

GOLDEN FLEECE

WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT



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GOLDEN FLEECE

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*A Collection
of Poems and Ballads
Old and New*

WILLIAM
ROSE
BENÉT

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THIS SELECTION FROM MY BOOKS
OF POEMS IS DEDICATED WITH
THE LOVE OF A LIFETIME TO

MY MOTHER,
FRANCES ROSE BENÉT

171833

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Of the poems as yet unpublished in book form, which are included in this volume, a few have appeared in *The Commonweal*, *The Ladies' Home Journal*, *The Lyric*, *The New Yorker* and *The Saturday Review of Literature*. The other selected poems are from two of my former books, "Man Possessed" and "Starry Harness."

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GOLDEN FLEECE

ART TO MANKIND

Extol the pliant line;
The wing adrift, the lifting wave, the falling star,
The poising diver's spring and curve
Dissolving on the air; the piston thighs
And reaching feet of runners; leap and swerve
Of tennis-players; birdlike rise
Of the pole-vaulter to the bar;
The whiplash throw
Lined from deep field to lay the runner low;
The leaning skater, as his strides engrave
Mirrored obsidian with a frosty vine!

Live also in the sway
Of the violinist to his bow whose voice is wail;
The wand that marshalled music draws
Weavingly forth; the dancer's bound
And fling and droop; the actor's subtle pause
And timing of mimetic sound;
The iridescence of the scale
Whose every note
Is orb'd of colour in the singer's throat;
And all articulate contours that flow
From moulding thumb upon the plastic clay!

The spectrum's alphabet
Through dust's most magic adjunct gleams in moistening oil;
Pristine the palette's language glows

On tautened canvas, that the eye can read
Even as protean words to hues transpose—
Painting and poetry, nimble at need
To the swift sense, for each a foil;
Till tonal seas
Of music overwhelm them both with harmonies
A little nearer to Man's cloudy dreams,
Glamorous yearning, and profound regret.

With such redresses drawn,
For ear and eye, from life and mind, the world atones
To all on their quotidian quest—
And with more various joy by far—and yet
Craving you search through nature without rest
New Erisichthons, sore beset
By famine in a field of stones,
Till, on the verge
Perhaps of death, like lightning may emerge
Insight that shows you blind
Blundering ephemera at great gates of Dawn!

JALDABAOTH

[There is a third person in a Gnostic Creation legend from which the name of my demiurge is derived. The true legend—a snake-worshipping one—has it that Darkness, the Father of all, begot a daughter, the Wisdom of God, who knew Life; the son of her agony being Jaldavaoth, the god who creates. He creates the world of the body, a clumsy imitation of the world of the spirit, etc. But the only borrowing from this legend has been the name of my protagonist. This is an entirely dissimilar imaginative attempt.]

IN A yeast of fire-flecked mist
Beyond the paths of the planets
Strove Jaldabaoth, the strong Angel, the son of Chaos.

In that terrible, trembling abyss of the Divine Nature
In whose pleroma the sage Heracleon
Saw emanating eons—assigned and ordered
Subordinate gods—
Time was but faint effulgence,
Scarcely a tremor in the ether.
Psyche, the sensuous soul,
Was lost in the palpitant pneuma
That quivered like heat round a flame, where Jaldabaoth
Wrestled with Chaos.

Be it The Word, or the Reason,
As bandied by Hellene and Hebrew
From agora to horned altar—
With Christian sects disputing
Of incorruptible substance
And its fleshed phantasmal appearance—
Be it one of these, or another
Simpler, more marvelous mystery,
Yet, remotely irradiant, the Logos
Still summons its demiurges
To labor and toil in the Void.

So strove Jaldabaoth,
The strong Angel, the son of Chaos,
Kneading and shaping and moulding
And working and welding a world
Out of the ether,
From the negation of matter,
Alone in the wreathing, seething, monstrous mist.
Alone.

Terrible trembling and shuddering shook the abyss,
Like the rumbling hollow drums of brute barbarians
Thudded instant in repetition, purring to thunder,
Breaking and booming and roaring high to a crepitant crash
And a dazzling lightning flash,
With billows of purple smoke, rolling to inky storm,
Following after.

Then far and faint came laughter,
Tricklings of infinite laughter,
Thin streams of molten silver scattering down
Through the heavy heaven of cloud—
Remote and ironic laughter.

Yet still strove Jaldabaoth, demiurge divine,
The strong Angel, the son of Chaos—
Grappling the clotted and fluid cloud to his breast,
Gripping with bulging-muscle enormous thighs
The cloud-stuff to him—striving and struggling with cloud
Even as Ixion, saith legend, begat the centaurs
When Juno slipped from her white and cumulous semblance
Back to the shining gates,
Back to the laughter-clanging golden gates,
Leaving her bronze-thewed lover frenziedly clinging her image,
Clasping celestial cheat.

Horns in the heaven,
Flaring horns of scorn from the corners of heaven
Wound wire-cruel sound
And fierce flagellation
Round the soul of Jaldabaoth.
But in his arms
As clay is kneaded and worked
A world took form.

Then the strong Angel
Stooped 'neath his feet for a fiery sun,
Shattered it 'twixt the gripe of his fingers, let fall
The glistering, glowing fragments in midst of his world,
Strewing the shards as a man sows seed—
Scattering them.

And again,
And again
He kneaded and worked his world between his knees
Till his eyes were blind with sweat.

Jaldabaoth
Flung forth one arm, and snatched a golden web
Of glimmering stars out of the misty abyss,
And crushed them to paste against the arch of his thigh
And powdered them to fine dust beneath his heel
And mixed them into the spinning maelstrom of his world,
And his world quickened and twirled and shaped toward a
sphere.

His world convulsed, and flickered with gaseous fumes,
And flared into flame.

And Jaldabaoth drenched it with hissing mist.

His world flung off planet on planet
Like smoke-rings or bubbles blown.
They spun in eccentric orbits . . . Cent'ring them all,
The coagulate matter dwindled and dwindled to throbbing
pulses
Of rosy or crimson embers,
And so diminished
Into a central sun
Of quivering heat and light.

And that first sun cooled, and the planets clanged in anger,
And hissed in mist—and another glowing sun
Swam forth, and other orbits ellipsed its Space.

Jaldabaoth was resting.
He squatted on sinewy heels above his world
Of little silver planets and golden suns—
And infinitesimal gems of sapphire water
Winking back from some turning sphere.

He had not yet made Man.

His agate eyes were full of the lack . . . but behind him
Came God, as one walks in a garden, and laid his touch
On his shoulder. And the flame-haired head flung back
And Jaldabaoth looked into the eyes of God.

And God breathed on his Angel's world,
Making Man.
And God drew blues skies like the folds of a cloak about his
face
And trod once more on his rounds of Eternity
To the next white outpost of the next demiurge.

Then languor and idleness came on that strong Angel.
Centuries passed as he slowly turned on his side
And stretched luxuriously,
For he was weary.

And then first on his eyes he was 'ware of a pricking and
tingling

And then a tremor that startled through all his being,
A tremor he could not still.

His lazy lids opened. He peered through cloud on his world.
It spun in its Space with a small and rhythmic sound.

Yet something like a fizzing of very tiny flies
Perturbed its whirl.

And again the pricking and tingling through the being
Of Jaldabaoth.

For upon its smallest of planets, on one of the tiniest islands,
The first, fur-skinned, flint-axed Doubter had whispered
"Why?"

Then Jaldabaoth was wroth, and he sent a plague and an
earthquake,
And the voice was still.

And the Angel sank back, and slumbered, and centuries passed.

Again the pricking and tingling,
More irritant now, more and more insistent. . . .
Cities were spread on one planet. In one of the cities
A scientist in an infinitesimal laboratory
Laid his weary forehead down 'mid a stench of bubbling test-
tubes

And shuddered "Why?"
And out of the alleys of cities
Oppression and extortion and filth and famine
Fumed upward "Why?"—and in a house of healing
A surgeon with baffled scalpel above a twisted wreck, half-
human,
That his work had saved to life, cursed coldly "Why?"
A farmer's wife, scanning an empty prairie,
Echoed his thought.
A clerk at his desk, a doughty general dying,
In half-delirium, played with the answerless question.
Youth and age and houses of death and birth
And camp and court and land and sea, unceasing,
Reiterated the word in many tongues.

"Is there a God? Who is our God, and Why?
What is this life? And *Why?*"

Jaldabaoth, rousing, gazed at his world
With wild new wonder . . .
And, as he gazed, his gaze
Grew microscopic, and centered upon one city
Set in the midst of a planet, and on one house
Set in the midst of that city, and on one room
In the house, and the smiling face of the man in that room.
The smile was not good to see.

The man sat at a desk littered with papers,
A pen in his hand.

The man's lip curled, as he said:
"God or no God, I had made a better world.
God or no God, I defy you, I blaspheme you.

All has been taken from me except one thing—
My hate of you.
Your priesthood is great—for all men are afraid.
But I am not afraid.
I am the least of atoms in your bad universe,
Urged to obey your laws.
Fed with fancies, creating superstitions,
Cheating and killing each other,
Juggling their Justice and Sunday Righteousness,
Clutching, snarling and denying,
Your 'children' swarm on this planet, and crawl to Fear.
But I am not afraid.
Visit me now with sudden and visible torture,
Kill me slowly in one of your sweet and infinite
Tortures reserved for the brave,
Shred me between your fingers now or soon,
After your high and holy Godlike fashion;
Set me riddles, and kill that I cannot solve them,
Damn the brain and the heart you made to beat
Out of your infinite mercy . . .
I am not afraid.
I hate you, I blaspheme you!"

The earth-creature's brain sucked down the very soul
Of Jaldabaoth, and laughed and mocked in its light.

And the son of Chaos looked on his son of chaos
And saw no fear.

Then Jaldabaoth was afraid.

With a vast and terrible wrench he freed his eyes
And his soul from the eyes and soul of the earthly brain.

And the form of the man on earth swayed in his chair
And sprawled to the floor in death.

But fixed in the being of Jaldabaoth, he became
A troubling mote, a stinging vexation of spirit.
So the strong Angel rose, and staggered, and reeled
Through the terrible, trembling abyss of the Divine Nature,
To find God.

But God was with His Angel as a vast and invisible power
That knew his questions: "Why have You made us then
To make such toys?" and, "These toys are terrible,
A vengeance, a sharp disaster!" and, worst of all,
"I have miscreated! Fiends, we are fiends, we are fiends!"

The eyes of the Angel dilated and diminished
With blazing torture, the ether shuddered around him.
He whirled in his steps as if to strive with God.

But God was both near and remote, and could not be grasped.

Then down in utter agony, Jaldabaoth
Sank, and the darkness was sick with his horrible tears.
And over and over again,
"What is this Life we have played with!" he sobbed and
sobbed.
"What is this Life—and *Why?*"

Then, speaking in perfect silence, God answered, saying:
"You too are only a thought within my brain,
A figment of my fancy,
A thing contrived.
But that which is created in my fancy,
A part of my thought,

Can never die, but must have eternal life.
For I am eternal, awfully eternal,
And there is no end.
But my thought had pity on me,
And it made for me metes and bounds, and anger and tears,
And joy and sorrow . . .
And eons, and angels, and men to rejoice and despair.
I am the father of all, unutterably lonely,
Save for my thoughts that are ye.
Ye all are stored in my memory that is Heaven.
There shall ye rest.
But while ye are my thoughts ye can have no rest,
For my Thought is forever the drudge of timeless time . . .
But when my own thought sickens, I seek for a new
Mood and manner of thought . . .
Therefore come rest in my memory, Jaldabaoth.
This mood of my thought is done."

And the voice ceased, and the void reeled, and the strong Angel
Basked in the retrospect of the infinite brain.

RIDDLE FOR POLYPHEMUS

O POLYPHEMUS, roll your eye,
That single eye we shun,
Scanning wildly earth and sky,
Glaring against the sun!

From glowering Aetna herd your flocks,
A woolly lava-flow,
To trot and blether round the rocks
Where tinkling wethers go.

The bell-rams bah, the little lambs
Stiff-leggèd wag and leap,
Bleating to their black-faced dams—
For sheep are only sheep.

Malformed stands the shepherd king,
A branched, uprooted tree,
At all horizons slaving,
Huge in stupidity;

And then a volleying roar he sends,
By silence undone,
With huddling sheep for only friends
Under the sun.

A pang has struck his heart forlorn,
His single eye would weep
Despair of Galatea, born
Queen of the crystal deep.

He wades in ocean to his knees,
He clubs the waves amain,
As though the amercing of all seas
Could wash him free from stain.

His pinetree-pipes in hands uncouth
Send forth a grievous sound,
As though the slaughtered soul of youth
Clamoured from underground.

But white with foam though waves are tossed,
High though winds are whirled,
Fathoms deep his lady's lost,
The jewel of the world!

O Polyphemus, beat your breast,
Tower against the sky,
Roll your eye from east to west,
Your single cyclops eye!

Love of her, like a river,
Escapes your searching hand;
Her ocean, forever,
Mocks your bone-strewn strand.

How should she attend your moan,
Clearest of spirits all,
When from your earth the time-long groan
Pierces her crystal hall?

How should she applaud your might,
When shadowy overhead
In noisome caverns of your night
She knows what blood was shed?

In her clear dreaming,
Time the reflux stream,
Your horror is seeming
And will pass like a dream.

But when the soul of man again
From your thralldom is free,
O you shall look on your lady then
Rising from the sea—

Like the dawn-wind feel her breath,
Though yours in pain be drawn,
And know as you lie stark in death
Your lady of death and dawn.

For more than ocean, more than sky,
Where height and depth are one,
Is the truth you held no reckoning by—
So Polyphemus, roll your eye,
Your single, evil cyclops eye,
And glare against the sun!

STAGE DIRECTIONS

TRUMPETS. Enter a King, in the sunset glare.
He sits in an antique chair. He fingers an antique ring.
The heavy cloak on his back is gold and black.

The hall is tall with gloom. A window stands
Full of scarlet sky. The hands of trees entreat the room,
Plucking and plucking the pane. An oblong stain

Of scarlet is flat on the floor. The projected flare
Slants to the foot of the chair. The chamber's farther door
Slowly advances its edge. A smoky wedge

Of thick blue mist, growing wider as the door swings
Noiseless, twitches the king's hands. He is crouched like a
spider.

His eyes are green as glass. Shudderings pass

That shrink him deep in his cloak. The door is wide.
The doorway, from side to side, is packed with mist like smoke.
The dreadful scarlet dies from the windowed skies.

Silence crosses the room. Nothing more.
Silence crowds from the door, gathers, gathers in gloom.
His fluttering fingers rise to cover his eyes.

Silence says nothing at all. It is thickly pressed,
Like a multitude obsessed with terror, from wall to wall.
Silence, deep with dread, is the weight of lead

That slowly constricts his breast. Fingers fight
At the throat, in fierce despite of death, as the drowned resist
Green gulfs that roar and ring. . . .

Exit the King.

NATIVITY

Now the tortuous text,
The volume perplexed
With intricate ironies,
The Book of Life, of years
Charged with blood and tears,
Let fall from your knees!

Read no more this night;
Raise to quelling light
Shed from simple stall
Eyes bewildered, blind
With passion, with the mind;
Let the book fall!

Dream a fabulous birth,
Muse on sorry earth
In Winter struck to Spring,—
Men of endless war
Fain again of a star
Of an alien king.

Pomp and panoply
Prostrate utterly
To a small doomed stranger,
To a sword of sharper strife,
To a word transvaluing life,
To the child in the manger!

PURPOSES

DREAM a flying mountain,
Or ocean turned to fire,
In mid-air a fountain,
Or rain like taut wire,
Or people in the moon—
These shall be, as soon
As you know your desire.

Dream the oak cloven
For a wan girl in green,
Or the glacier an oven
Where flames roar between,
Or God from Heaven leaning—
These may have meaning
When your purpose is seen.

Nor in such discourses
As wear the night through
Surprised be the sources
Of wisdom to you,
Nor though, to trumpet-peals,
The book of seven seals
Opened wide in your view.

But on primal contention
Profound in confusion
Some quick apprehension
Dissolving illusion
Will startle and depart,
Transfixing your heart
By its sudden intrusion.

And all of your power
In courses well planned
Will lie then as a tower
Shaken to sand,
When beauty like terror
Shows the scope of your error
In the work of your hand.

This you believe,
And this you deny,
For this loss you grieve,
In this hope you die—
The inerrable beam
Shatters your dream
In the blink of an eye.

Yet beauty past telling
And wisdom past knowing,
Through solitude welling,
In silence are growing—
And, unheard, to the will
Whisper, "Be still!"
In the time of their own bestowing.

MAD BLAKE

BLAKE saw a treeful of angels at Peckham Rye,
And his hands could lay hold on the tiger's terrible heart.
Blake knew how deep is Hell, and Heaven how high,
And could build the universe from one tiny part.
Blake heard the asides of God, as with furrowed brow
He sifts the star-streams between the Then and the Now,
In vast infant sagacity brooding, an infant's grace
Shining serene on his simple, benignant face.

Blake was mad, they say—and Space's Pandora-box
Loosed its wonders upon him—devils, but angels indeed.
I, they say, am sane, but no key of mine unlocks
One lock of one gate wherethrough Heaven's glory is freed.
And I stand and I hold my breath, daylong, yearlong,
Out of comfort and easy dreaming evermore starting awake—
Yearning beyond all sanity for some echo of that Song
Of Songs that was sung to the soul of the madman, Blake!

THE END OF CHRISTABEL

"I desisted with a deeper dejection than I am willing to remember."—Coleridge.

ALONG the mountain, moving through a cloud
Less tenebrous than that upon his mind,
Went Coleridge; and the wind was loud behind,
Ahead and overhead the wind was loud.

Incessantly it blustered, to prevail
Against all effort of the marvelous brain,
Dissolving aery edifice as vain:
The wind from Skiddaw and from Borrowdale.

Searching within his double cloud a sign
For new pursuit of his mysterious theme,
And hearing only requiem to his dream,
And muttering "Accursèd 'Wallenstein'!"

At length, by rectory firelight, filled and warm
And deep in wine, anew began to burn
The dream, the brilliant faculty return
As in a lull of inner and outer storm.

So all the following day the driven pen
Ran on and on, as deep in trance he wrought
The spell-bound chronicle that thrall'd his thought,
The like of which was never known again.

Such verse as Purchas and an anodyne
From treasuries of Time had stolen in dream,
"Images on the surface of a stream
Scattered to naught"—line on mesmeric line!

Till, in a "giddiness of heart and brain,"
He reached the last whereat the pen was dropt;
The vision vanished and the music stopped;
And, staring up beyond the dismal pane,

He heard again the wind that seemed to be
Destiny, as it triumphed down the vale,
The wind from Skiddaw and from Borrowdale
Blowing his requiem through eternity;

The sound that seemed forever in his ears,
The drone of Time that mocked his works and ways,
The imminent desertion of the days,
The faint inexorable horn one hears

Far off in youth—against the last resort
Of words, a clarion—till we clearly see
The shrouded figure by the shadowy tree,
Dim though our eyes; and know he blows the mort.

So Coleridge listened in his gloom; and yet,
Forgot by haggard eye and tightened lip,
In port already stood the phantom ship
That means the wreck of art if men forget.

More than the mariner's curse it had to tell,
Significant of splendor through the gloom,
Whose burning seraphs filled the twilit room
That marked the unending end of "Christabel!"

OVERTURE TO MAN

CHILD with a wish,
Ever the child with a wish—
Hands waving to grasp the light like a golden fish,
Fists beating its golden gong; diminutive fat
Hands that would clutch at Night like the fur of a velvet
cat. . . .

Voracious infant desire
For all things bright, for fluttering ribbons of fire,
Sparkles of shattered glass—every surprise
That flashes before owlish unfocussed eyes,
Stared at, flapped at, greeted with vehement cries. . . .

Delight of the flesh,
Easeful delight of flesh,
Drunken delight in the fount flowing afresh,
Swollen affront at the insult of any pin
Minutely touching the skin. . . .

Power swelling the heart,
Exultant power
Flailing blankets and pillows, stopped in a stour
Of utter amazement over a fly on the wall—
Power to creep, to crawl,
At last to stand—great magic!—to totter and fall
But stand again, after all. . . .

Faces and hands
Familiar grown with all their astounding demands,
Hands and faces that first descended from heaven
Enormous with doom on the early languid sweven

Now passing from rounded eyes and limbs that kick in their
bands—

Omnipotent faces and hands!

Huge cooing and grinning and winking
Masks that waxed and waned while the eyes were blinking,
Massive arms and terrible sweeps of motion
With the floor below like an ocean
Under the high precipitous cliff of dandling—
Awful prolonged much-handling!

The wonder of words,
Syllables like the ruffling feathers of birds,
Brusque bubbles of sound lost in the infinite pool
Of language, of words rippling and cool
And words electric and hot,
And words that are not
One or the other, but out of some dream forgot
Summon enchantment. . . . Looming mouths that mull
Over such words in multitude gleaming or growing dull. . . .

Patterns of things,
Contours with legs and tails and beaks and wings
Striped or spotted, coloured with this or that brightness;
Objects of heaviness, lightness,
Large and small, lumpy or round or square—
Stool and table and chair. . . .

Edens to name,
Taught by the Gods, till syllables sound the same,
And the din called laughter is less, and the consequent
shame. . . .

Edens to explore
All through the jungle over the nursery floor,

Impeded by blocks and books, till a thunderclap
Of dire necessity lifts one to nurse's lap. . . .

Dark, and then lovely light;
Between the shutters of night
Dazzling, absorbing days,
Yet always somnolent haze
Over phase on phase
Of busiest idling, of extortionate seeing
Of the being not yet being. . . .

At last, a Spell
Coaxed from each fumbled and tumbled syllable,
Compelling the Gods on high
More surely than a cry
Or a fist that waves at a fly or a star in the sky—
Words that stammer in sequence, mortality's "*I am I!*"

THE FALCONER OF GOD

I FLUNG my soul to the air like a falcon flying.

I said, "Wait on, wait on, while I ride below!

I shall start a heron soon

In the marsh beneath the moon—

A strange white heron rising with silver on its wings,

Rising and crying

Wordless, wondrous things;

The secret of the stars, of the world's heart-strings

The answer to their woe.

Then stoop thou upon him, and grip and hold him so!"

My wild soul waited on as falcons hover.

I beat the reedy fens as I trampled past.

I heard the mournful loon

In the marsh beneath the moon.

And then—with feathery thunder—the bird of my desire

Broke from the cover

Flashing silver fire.

High up among the stars I saw his pinions spire.

The pale clouds gazed aghast

As my falcon stooped upon him, and gript and held him fast.

My soul dropt through the air—With heavenly plunder?—

Gripping the dazzling bird my dreaming knew?

Nay! but a piteous freight,

A dark and heavy weight

Despoiled of silver plumage, its voice forever stilled—

All of the wonder

Gone that ever filled

Its guise with glory. O bird that I have killed,

How brilliantly you flew

Across my rapturous vision when first I dreamed of you!

Yet I fling my soul on high with new endeavor,
And I ride the world below with a joyful mind.

I shall start a heron soon

In the marsh beneath the moon—

A wondrous silver heron its inner darkness fedges!

I beat forever

The fens and the sedges.

The pledge is still the same—for all disastrous pledges,

All hopes resigned!

My soul still flies above me for the quarry it shall find.

ANOTHER LANGUAGE

WHAT turn of hand or turn of head
Say, have power to raise the dead
Or lay the ghost, indwellers both
Of the mind's customary sloth.
Gesture—posture—speak, as eyes
In their depths materialize
Subtler than speech the actual thought
Even while moving lips have taught
Lovely lies the thoughts believe . . .
Read such language, and retrieve
Protean truth so lost in speech!
Let the arm, the shoulder, teach
Secret hope or resignation,
Quick despair or detestation,
Frozen by a sculptural glance
Though unbetrayed by countenance!
In the fluid changing line
Of the body's strange design
Infinite matter for translation;
Secret, subtle intimation;
Forms and flows more swift than thinking,
Proclaims some deep accord or shrinking,
Conveys the individual form
Of spirit in the atom-storm.
The body holds its own discourse
Instinctive. Words can never force
Its cells from their essential knavery,
Nobility, cowardice, or bravery . . .
And so our wonder starts afresh
At the deep sapience of the flesh.

THE LOVERS

O FIERCE and tremulous embrace
When limbs of lovers interlace
Supine and prone, their bodies lying
In fiery trance profound as dying,
Through apparent torture seeking
Pledges that elude all speaking,
Willing both their souls to fusion,
Crucified on love's illusion,
Striving with all beauty's might,
Shook by terrible delight.

Here in one mortal body spread
Beneath one body on a bed
Flares the apocalyptic hour.
Simultaneously in flower,
Pain and Joy, to work as one,
To strike impossible unison
From bodily rhythms, sleep in each
As harmony beyond all speech.
Pitiful and frantic bliss,
Burning mystery of the kiss,
Yet the harried heart's recourse
To all being's inmost source
Where tangled circumstantial things
Are chaff beneath the winnowing wings
Of the old assuaged desire.
So the trancelike rhythms tire,
So the ecstasy is done,
Tragic passion sighed upon.
What each rendered has endowed
Limbs with music, eyes with light,

God and goddess clasp in cloud,
Ancient and oracular night
Lulls to deep on inner deep
Those it clothes with wondering sleep.

Hunger and anger of all being
Will wake again, and dark foreseeing.
Now these rest by murmuring springs
Of single blood that in them sings,
Time has paused on their accord,
Love laid by both torch and sword;
O mysteriously they rest,
Human breast on human breast.

ODE FOR AN EPOCH

WHEN at our history men stand amazed,
When there is light to see
The nature of such things as are to be,
And shall be—then—
When some, our captains, may have grown as quaint
And crazed as any mediæval saint
To marveling eyes of a new order of men . . .

When all that so involves our baffled day
Is passed away,
And these our cities, like Carthage or like Tyre,
Grow strange with alien arrogance and power,
That seemed the unfolding flower
And deepest utterance of Mankind's desire . . .

When our concerns, our tyrannous machines
That were the means
To no sure end, but turned against their masters—
Our intricate finance that would not fit
For all our wit
In any pattern save foretold disaster's—
When all these singular things,
Even our wings
That hummed and drummed, a locust-cloud, through heaven,
Are gathered to the ingurgitating past,
And men at last, steadfast
In flesh and blood, are for new sins forgiven . . .

Then even the Jeremiahs of our time,
Or those whose minds can climb
The clear, cold air of reason, or those others
Of hot head and hot heart—

Inveighing, for their part,
In the belief that all men may be brothers—
Even the words of these
Like leaves from autumn trees
May flutter to dust, or start mere bright surprise
Mixed, it may be, with laughter,
In minds that, after
An age, confute our cleverest surmise—
Mixed, it may be, with sighs
To think that on this wise
Our world-in-space, incredible to Time
For its swift power to move,
Crawls slower in the groove
Of progress than a snail its trail of slime . . .

Then the historian
Poring upon some plan
He draughts, with dates, with gazetteer and chart,
And burnishing fine prose
To explicate our woes,
Though still confounded by the human heart,
Will with a sage disdain
Make our confusion plain,
Precisely point the errors of all schools,
And, through the zodiac,
Show on a crazy tack
Our barque of souls, our precious ship of fools . . .

Meanwhile, the wintry tree
Cased in glare ice will be
A palace of blossom to the soft south air;
Meanwhile, rivers run
Under moon, under sun;

Mountains their flamboyant sunsets wear;
And deserts lie as still
As fields that men may till,
And stars to wondering lovers sparkle near,
Though far, cold worlds of light
To aging sight—
And poets are drunken with the atmosphere . . .

And rhythms fall and rise
In the earth, in the skies,
And fugitive, fortunate moments stand alway;
And men contrive a god
From cloud or clod;
And night we know . . . and day . . .

Meanwhile, the hurried blood
Whirls us through myriad mood,
And instants are immortal in our breath,
And deeds are blowing grain,
And love we know, and pain . . .
And life . . . and death . . .

TRIUMPH OF PERSEPOLIS

“Dr. Breasted said: ‘. . . there has never been any discovery like it anywhere in Western Asia since archæological excavation began there almost a century ago.’”

“Is IT not brave to be a king, Techelles—!”
—And dig in triumph to Persepolis?
Peer into excavations on your bellies
And marvel at the length of time it is
Since Xerxes had the Hellespont to flog
And proud Darius won kingship through his steed
And Alexander, drunk on love and grog,
Thrust fire among the rooftrees of the Mede!

Is it not brave to be an archæologist,
Digging black lime beneath the burning sun,
Confounding the historical apologist
With resurrection of a Babylon!
For now again the moon on Zagros mountain
Fills ample terraces with light, to flow
On colonnade and plinth and stair and fountain
Of centuries on centuries ago.

Rigid the horsemen and the charioteers,
The slaves and palace guards with sword at knee,
Conquerors of the unconquerable years,
Loom from the stone like scarlet tapestry;
And where at zenith fell that Asian art
Once more it lifts to light, its time being full,
Unflawed, unblemished, in varied counterpart
Of life beneath the lion and the bull.

But we—what of this arrogant age we cherish?
Answer, dark Earth! After dim æons of time
Will something of an art that did not perish
Speak to the future from the prisoning lime?
Will some great semblance then, when earth is falling
From spectral ruins in a dark abyss,
Clamor with comparable awe, recalling
This final triumph of Persepolis?

SIMPLE MATHEMATICS

INTEGERS, dance; infinitesimal
Integers, dance! Contrive your decimal,
Superhuman palm and thumb—
Scribble your millennial sum!
Add, subtract, and multiply
All a man is ere he die!

He is his body's health and pains,
The crawling fire that eats his veins,
The blood that sings, the bile that seethes,
The heart that beats, the lung that breathes,
The intricately articulate
Frame of bones whose flesh is fate;
A pinch of dust made moist with dew
That haggard spirits hurry through;

But most of all is he his thought
Wherefrom his hells and heavens are wrought,
The infinity within his skull
Of noble and of beautiful,
Of gross and mean and dark and vile;
The one man on his desert isle
Peopling the night beyond his fire
With shadow shapes of his desire,
Of his hope and of his fear.
His inmost loneliness is here
Gnawing the rock of entity
In a dumb fury not to be;
And here spasmodic exultation
Whose hair is golden conflagration
And body all light and wings all glamour
Divides the night with echoing clamour

In all tongues and in no tongue
Hailing a world made fresh and young
By love, by zest of bodily power,
Crying in some incredible hour
A vast redemption; and on the stone,
Next instant dashed and prone, alone,
With taste of granite on its lips
As the tear falls where the blood drips.

Oh integer of integers,
The You, the Me—I make my verse
Of you, of me, the universes
Within ourselves, that death disperses,
Each populous being, each vibrant dot
So huge with all the world is not—
With all man is, infinitesimal
In that catastrophic sum
That may achieve its final decimal
By Judgment or Millenium.
Of all their worlds the sole testator,
I list their multitudinous I,
Absorbed in me, the one creator
Of all the roads they traveled by—
Spread out the chart of land and sea
That show the continents of Me!
Impale upon a trifling pen
The multifarious women and men
Housed in a mind that momentarily
Conceived itself of each to be!

Integer in the great mischance,
Advance then, whirl your dervish dance;
Tiptoe on pinnacle, plunged in pit,

Through vision after vision flit,
Howl or trumpet because of it,
Midge-buzzings of a midge-like wit;
Build splendors out of bulging cloud,
Squirm, blind worm, within your clod,
Strange presences around you crowd
As though the dusk announced a god.
Thus each instant of each day
Gods arise and flash to naught
From the long yearning of the clay
Through the fog we know as thought.

PRIMUM MOBILE

PRISMY shafts as clear as glass
Climb through golden glooms and dun.
Struck athwart them, sunbeams pass,
Black though tempest hide the sun.
Down a vivid blue crevasse
Sudden stars are wildly bright.
Rondured like a dome of brass
Light deceives from height to height.

Hissing serpentines of rain,
Streaming storms of hail are hurled,
Swirled and sown abroad like grain
Here, above the whirling world;
Vast and vague, as in a brain
Quick with all the pricks of sense,
Clouds of ever-changing stain
Coil and drift to confluence.

Ghostly spawn of vortices,
Spinning deeply dark and dim—
Phantoms known as flowers and trees,
Seas where glittering fishes swim,
Rooms—like these—where sit and talk
Beings of most curious grace,
Streets where hurrying shadows walk—
Somehow, then, emerged from Space.

All this world of Me and You,
Each preëminent event,
Twinkles like a spark of dew,
Nucleus of a firmament.
Vast and oceanic flame

Fades before one beam of eyes.
Sound of a familiar name
Echoing fills enormous skies.

Place your hand upon my heart
Lest some shattering blast be blown,
Lest these four walls flash apart
And infinity its own
Claim in flame.

Yet, as your face
Turns to meet my inmost dreams,
There was—something—Outer Space—
How preposterous it seems!

THE UNJUST WORD

WHEN the unjust word is said
And sudden dumbness of the dead
Weights me like a leaden cloak,
All glitter and gleam before you spoke,
Fiery sparkling, light and thin
As gold betwixt gold-beater's skin—
When burnished plumage puffs to dust
And, moving on because I must,
I gasp to bear the staring thrust,
Never fear,—oh, never fear
Some silent wall is builded here!
Nothing's here of iron or stone,
Only a shuddering wraith alone
Meeting with blank and haggard eyes
Insult from outrageous skies,
Desperate for a voice to call
Across wild distance, through it all—
Dismayed before a world so old,
Numbed and withering in the cold.

But as a man who travels light
Through glacial chaos, through the night,
Toward habitation past a bleak
Torment of crevasse and peak,
Calming his hammering heart beneath—
So, through an age, I grit my teeth,
Willing with every underbreath
A shattering of this sudden death.

Shattered it is! The whole sky clears
To iridescence of our tears.

Heart against heart a moment after
The world is whirling round our laughter.

When the unjust word is said,
And rending trumpets rouse the dead,
If then a hawk of shadow hovers
Above the frantic clasp of lovers,
Look! Your word is in my breast,
Who know its fluttering fears the best;
Throbbing wild, its scornful woe
Tells me all I did not know;
From fierce pursuit of destiny
I shall protect it deep in me,
Shelter it for eternity,
Smooth and soothe this vivid bird
That sings the light—your unjust word.

BRAZEN TONGUE

QUICK in spite I said unkind
Words that should have struck me blind.
Flatly on my eardrums rung
The raucous echoes of my tongue.

Burnished bees in an iron hive
Seemed my wits, and scarce alive
I sat with elbows on my knees
Sick with silence like disease.

Slowly through the solid floor
I sank, till there was nothing more
Than a grease-spot of me there
Shadowed by the upright chair.

O last night I lay awake
Parrying darkness for your sake,
Like an armory glittered bright
The lilied hours of our delight.

O this morning I intended
All the virtue this has ended,
Golden as a new-coined planet!
Now I wither into granite.

Tongue, you are a tongue of fire,
Shriveling like a white-hot wire,
Blackening like a dragon's breath
Flower-fluttering fields with death.

Tongue, you are a tongue of brass
In the jawbone of an ass,
Slaying what was most divine—
Not the reeking Philistine.

So, she dug me from my quarry;
Came and said that she was sorry;
Sprinkled me with words like myrrh;
So I sat and stared at her;

And so I climb the burning mountain
And sit beside the lava fountain,
And, white with ashes, wonder why
In the devil I am I.

THE FAWN IN THE SNOW

THE brown-dappled fawn
Bereft of the doe
Shivers in blue shadow
Of the glaring snow,

His whole world bright
As a jewel, and hard,
Diamond white,
Turquoise barred.

The trees are black,
Their needles gold,
Their boughs crack
In the keen cold.

The brown-dappled fawn
Bereft of the doe
Trembles and shudders
At the bright snow.

The air whets
The warm throat,
The frost frets
At the smooth coat.

Brown agate eyes
Opened round
Agonize
At the cold ground,

At the cold heaven
Enameled pale,
At the earth shriven
By the snowy gale,

At magic glitter
Burning to blind,
At beauty bitter
As an almond rind.

Fawn, fawn,
Seek for your south,
For kind dawn
With her cool mouth,

For green sod
With gold and blue
Dappled, as God
Has dappled you,

For slumbrous ease,
Firm turf to run
Through fruited trees
Into full sun!

The shivering fawn
Paws at the snow.
South and dawn
Lie below;

Richness and mirth,
Dearth forgiven,
A happy earth,
A warm heaven;

The sleet streams,
The snow flies;
The fawn dreams
With wide brown eyes.

FIRE AND GLASS

THE thistly yellow flame flows up like water,
The dusk brick glows.
Fashion the ropelike glass; your lip can blow it
To a vase like a rose,
To a goblet curved like a wave, with a stem like a lily.
Glass can be spun
To frailer lace than the cobweb brown old spiders
Weave in the sun.

Not pure gold ingots nor all the renown of iron
Nor the blushing brand,
Nor crackling cataracts of molten metal
Kissing the sand,
So praise this cleanly and bewildered fury
Potent to shape
Emerging contours scintillant as diamond,
Smooth as the grape.

O self-consuming sun, the dew-on-the-gossamer's
Delicate glint,
What symmetries petaled and pearled and fragile as flowers
Take form and tint
From this fierce unslakable thirst and famine of fire
Cold stars control!
Even thus, O love, through the blood's rebuked rebellion—
Thus my soul—!

ETERNAL MASCULINE

NEITHER will I put myself forward as others may do,
Neither, if you wish me to flatter, will I flatter you;
I will look at you grimly, and so you will know I am true.

Neither when all do agree and lout low and salute,
And you are beguiled by the tree and devout for the fruit,
Will I seem to be aught but the following eyes of a brute.

I will stand to one side and sip of my hellebore wine,
I will snarl and deride the antics and airs of the swine;
You will glance in your pride, but I will deny you a sign.

I will squint at the moon and be peaceful because I am dead,
I will whistle a tune and be glad of the harshness I said.
O you will come soon, when the stars are a mist overhead!

You will come, with eyes fierce; you will act a defiant surprise.
Quick lightnings will pierce to our hearts from the pain in our
eyes,
Standing strained and averse, with the trembling of love that
defies.

And then I will know, by the heartbreaking turn of your head,
My madness brought low in a hell that is spared to the dead.
The upas will grow from the poisonous words that I said;

From under its shade out to where like a statue you stand,
Without wish to evade, I will reach, I will cry with my hand,
With my spirit dismayed, with my eyes and my mouth full of
sand. . . .

THE WOODCUTTER'S WIFE

TIMES she'll sit quiet by the hearth, and times
She'll ripple with a fit of twinkling rhymes
And rise and pirouette and flirt her hand,
Strut jackdaw-like, or stamp a curt command
Or, from behind my chair, suddenly blind me;
Then, when I turn, be vanished from behind me.

TIMES she'll be docile as the gentlest thing
That ever blinked in fur or folded wing,
And then, like lightning in the dead of night,
Fill with wild, crackling, intermitting light
My mind and soul and senses—and next be
Aloof, askance as a dryad in a tree.

THEN she'll be gone for days; when next I turn,
There, coaxing yellow butter from the churn,
Rubbing to silver every pan of tin,
Or conjuring colour from the rooms within
Through innocent flowers, she'll hum about the house
Bright-eyed and secret as a velvet mouse.

'TIS not your will They do—no, nor the Will
That hushes Anselm's chapel overhill.
Something that drifts in clouds, that sings in rain,
That laughs in sunlight, shudders in the pain
Of desolate seas, or broods in basking earth
Governs Their melancholy and Their mirth.

ELUSIVE still! Elusive as my reason
For trudging woodward in or out of season
To swing the ringing ax, as year by year
The inexplicable end draws slowly near,

And, in between, to think and think about it—
Life's puzzling dream—deride, believe, and doubt it.

But if I leave her seriously alone
She comes quite near, preëmpts some woodland stone,
Spreads out her kirtle like a shimmering dress
And fills my mind's remorseful emptiness
With marvelous jewels made of words and wit
Till all my being sings because of it.

Sings of the way her bronze hair waves about
And how her amber-lighted eyes peer out;
Sings of her sudden laughter floating wild,
Of all her antics of a fairy child,
Of her uplifted head and swift, demure
Silence and awe, than purity more pure.

So I must scratch my head and drop my ax,
While in her hands my will is twisted wax;
So, when she goes, deaf, dumb and blind I sit
Watching her empty arm-chair opposite,
Witched by evasive brightness in the brain
That grows full glory when she comes again.

INSCRIPTION FOR A MIRROR IN A
DESERTED DWELLING

SET silver cone to tulip flame!
The mantel mirror floats with night
Reflecting still green watery light.
The sconces glimmer. If she came
Like silence through the shadowy wall
Where walls are wading in the moon
The dark would tremble back to June.
So faintly now the moonbeams fall,
So soft this silence, that the verge
Of speech is reached. Remote and pale
As through some faint viridian veil
The lovely lineaments emerge,
The clearly amber eyes, the tint
Of pearl and faintest rose, the hair
To lacquered light a silken snare
Of devious bronze, the tiny dint
With which her maker mocked the years
Beneath her lip imprinting praise.
Dim flower of desecrating days,
The old reflection, strange with tears,
Is gazing out upon the gloom,
Is widening eyes to find the light
In reminiscence, in the night
Of this foregone, forgotten room.

And you, the watcher, with your eyes
As wide as hers in dark distress,
Who never knew her loveliness
But guess through glass her shadowy guise,
For you around the glass I trace

This secret writing, that will burn
Like witch-fire should her shade return
To haunt you with that wistful face.

At least no gesturing figures pass;
Here is no tragic immanence
Of all the scenes of small events
That pantomimed before the glass.
No bliss, no passion, no despair,
No other actor lingers now;
The moonlight on a lifted brow
Is all—the eyes so wide aware
Of clouds that pass with stars, and suns,
Of mystery that pales the cheek,
Of all the heart could never speak,
Of joy and pain so vivid once,
That ceased with music and the lights,
Dimming to darkness and repose. . . .
Lean then and kiss that ghostly rose
That was her face, this night of nights—
And know the vision fled indeed,
The mirror's surface smooth and cold,
The words unbreathed, the tale untold,
The past unpiteous to your need!

“WILD PHILOMELA”

THE step to silence taken,
More far than star from star;
The air still shaken
Where you are,

Where you burn with your branding,
Lift to your light,
Nourish understanding
Of our night.

Is it understanding
Or mere brute grieving—
The senses demanding,
Or believing?

Does it matter, does it matter
In the void left behind
Where the heart writhes to flatter
The mind?

Sudden, in desolation,
Where you were not you grew,
Light filled creation,
Followed you.

From cruelty then or kindness
In escape you were away.
Utter blindness
Canceled day.

Bronze hair, the throat of one flying,
Level eyes scourging fear,

Singular laughter, eloquent crying—
You were here.

Yet, midway of Spartan duty,
Stood clear, facing the dawn
Of terrible ultimate beauty—
And are gone.

Some will praise you, some doubt you;
Most will say and nothing tell.
To live without you
Is their hell.

Glittering utterly bright,
Fabulous valour unforgot—
O once more the Light! The night
Knew it not.

SAGACITY

WE KNEW so much; when her beautiful eyes could lighten,
Her beautiful laughter follow our phrase;
Or the gaze go hard with pain, the lips tighten,
On the bitterer days.

Oh, ours was all knowing then, all generous displaying.
Such wisdom we had to show.
And now there is merely silence, silence, silence saying
All we did not know.

IN LIMINE

COMING into the old room with your words rising around me,
With step dragging and stopped and a hand turning the key,
Sudden light on emptiness can no longer confound me
Nor inanimate things I see

All in their old places, still as if they were listening,
Sprung to light harsh as pain. All these are in my view:
Bed and table and chair and the broad mirror glistening
Blank of the image of you.

But now that is usual strangeness, once so appalling.
The edge of sense is dulled, save for this; as heretofore
I have imagined a wraith hovering near at my calling
As I opened the door;

Though I have not called but whispered (the many times I
have spoken
To the silence-without-end being proof of the folly of men,)
And yet I could swear to the presence that proffers a pitiful
token
Again and again.

Pitiful, in that my failure then for an instant blinds me.
Not that love might not remember, but that love may watch
and wait
As a child hides to surprise. Such superstition reminds me
Early and late

Of that exquisite devotion persistent beneath all changes,
Of the soul's steady gaze—lovely nemesis wavering there
For a breath, for a heartbeat. . . It is this that stuns and
deranges.
It is this that is hard to bear.

SONG

IN THE too painful night
After blank day
When all your inner sight
Seems to betray,
When the old leaden weight
On the heart lies,
When the lamp burns late,
The darkness sighs,

Summon her thoughts to keep
Yours from despair,
Summon her eyes from sleep,
Her arms, her hair—
If but her phantom even
Lies on your breast,
You can make peace with heaven,
You can find rest.

THE PONIES

(New Forest)

TURNING down the lane, we heard a scuffle,
A trample, jostle, and snort.
They were crowded in the dusk before our cottage
To see were we their sort;

But they scared before our footsteps coming slowly,
Scattering past us up the lane,
The ragamuffin vagabonds of ponies,
Trotting hoof and flopping mane.

And by night, coming home across the common,
With the moon behind a cloud,
You would very nearly stumble on them grazing
Till they loomed and snorted loud,

Pretending they were gobbiluns or ghaisties,
Whereas, do you suppose
The apocalyptic horse in Revelations
Had a pushing velvet nose?

There were pigs that routed mast beneath the oak-trees,
There were birds to trill and call,
There were pleasant dogs, but still I think the ponies
Were the best beasts of all;

And I wish that I were strolling with my ashplant
To our cottage down the lane,
And I wish that you were there to cast your glamour
Over books and tea again;

And I wish that it was dusk and we were homing,
Turning off beside the pond,
Almost laughing once again to hear them snorting
In the dusk down beyond

Where they huddled thrusting heads across the wicket
Of our cottage, to report
To the rabbits and the badgers in the Forest
Whether we were of their sort.

FIREFLY SERENADE

TO LADIES in the realms of light
I tune my wheezy concertina,
For I could sing of them all night,
Of Elinor, Emily, and Christina!

There was a fourth, Elizabeth,
Aurora and the *Sonnets* show it,
Who lovely lived beyond her death—
But then she had her major poet.

Here a mere rhymer tries a tune
Like little gleams a firefly raises
Twinkling from dark woods at the moon
Because her splendor wakes his praises.

The golden praise of Algernon
You may adduce, who'd never seen a
Diviner poet for ages gone
Than his incomparable Christina—

But god and firefly know no combats,
The god may blaze, the firefly spark it,
So I shall sing my praise of wombats
And minikin men in "Goblin Market,"

And starrier lyrics of devotion
Whereof a misprized age is warden;
And then I'll twinkle over ocean
To Emily in her Amherst garden,

Who knew a special stile to Heaven
Though willows droop and tears may darkle,

And from the rock around her even
Chipped out a quartz of diamond sparkle.

And then, it being long till dawn,
My song shall flit to where I know
Slim graces thread a satin lawn
Before an Attic portico,

Where slender in a silver kirtle,
On silver pipes where no notes quarrel,
One too adorable for myrtle
Plays destined for the glossy laurel.

There most of all I shall adore,
Dust at her feet—and well I know it—
My rose and crystal Elinor;
And wish she had a better poet.

*So ladies in the realms of light,
Forgive my tremulous concertina;
For I should like to play all night
To Elinor, Emily, and Christina!*

DIRIGIBLE

DECEMBER night, wind-driven,
Where late the airs were soft;
And the airship, gray on a gray heaven,
A long bulk cruising aloft;

Blending into the gloom,
Save for one row of gleams
Studded forward. Her pilot-room?
Or the grinning teeth of dreams?

Hung on the night—and gone:
That instant she seemed to me
Through deep enormous ocean drawn—
Our city under the sea;

For thus from bone-white caves
The small crabs scuttle and spy
When a shadow falls through glassy waves
And the looming shark goes by.

MONDAY, TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY—.

HE WRAPS injustice round him like a cloak, in
Which he parades, preposterously lone.
Life's pastry lies about her, mashed and broken,
Wasting its custard on a paving stone.
In high steel frames men trick grim death on girders,
In dark deep mines men grope the damp like moles,
Sidestreets of cities teem with thefts and murders,
In marble libraries aspiring souls
Sleuth the Great Word. . . Mr. and Mrs. X
Dramatize contrarieties of sex.

He lights a cigarette and slumps aloof.
She flirts her lip-stick out and wetly sighs.
A furtive wind is prowling round their roof,
The city stares—an octopus of eyes—
Pouring its darkness forth like inky fluid. . .
His hands are jittery on the radio.
The street moon, golden sickle of a druid,
Gleams, reaping here no silvery mistletoe
Worshiped with blood-rites. . . Yet their curious plight,
On second thought, might welcome such a rite!

He tries a book. She tries a magazine.
Within them both deep indignation swells.
Around them their apartment glows serene
Among a thousand like upholstered hells.
Their paths to this *impasse* defy analysis,
Save that the trivial now is grown so huge
As to induce in both complete paralysis
Of reason and resort to subterfuge.
Their burning wrongs sing ringing in their brains
The oldest and the dismalest refrains.

Was it the theatre-tickets or a gown
Or either's lateness or a chance remark?
High in the serried cliffs all over town
Souls of a similar tinder wait the spark
That flares monotony with sudden color,
Jangling nerves jangled by the telephone,
And, after vivid eruption renders duller
Than ever lives such as these two have known;
For now they pant with pain, these folk methodical,
Like people in their favorite periodical.

So doors will slam and voices shrill and bicker,
And she will weep and he will growl and curse,
Till fury is diminished to a flicker
As both decide they'd hardly feel much worse
If they were friends; and then in ways circuitous
One will apologize and one forgive.
Charges and complaints and grievances gratuitous
Will all be gently shaken in a sieve
Of moans and whimpers—till their rancour dies
In surfeit of emotional exercise.

A molten heat is raving at earth's core,
And deep through heaven rush planets clothed in flame,
The far-off jungles, the deep oceans roar,
The homeless tread a darkness without name,
The wretched groan in chains, the more defiant
Stride under baleful stars with starrier thirst,
Life shakes the mortal soul as might a giant
Rage against obdurate bars he fain would burst. . .
But slumber's bumbings, in mellifluous key,
Now roam the bedroom of Apartment D!

ASIDES

POET IN SECLUSION

ALL that they bickered and bellowed about
Lies beyond that door that has shut them out.
Now, from these bits that bestrew the floor,
My house of glass must be built once more.

Carefully, painfully, ache by ache,
For folly's truth and an old faith's sake,
With all the strength of my heart and brain—
That tomorrow may blow it to bits again.

MEDITATION

I marvel on the devastating quarrels,
The poisoned passion, the bitter endless throes
Of folk who pride themselves upon their morals—
But then, there'd be no novelists, I suppose.

MANIFESTO

"Communication is not the artist's function!"
But one is led to doubt, I grieve to state,
Whether the framers of that fond injunction
Really have anything to communicate.

MALE AND FEMALE

We are carefully watching each other,
We are prowling through casual speech,
We are drifting toward reefs through the smother
Of each one's awareness of each.

We are jockeying now for position,
We are dropping the duellist's glove,
We are tempting the cruel perdition
Of something called love.

AT A PARTY

Frightened among the frightfully witty,
To all these teeth there's naught to say.
Isn't it really rather a pity
To work so hard at being gay?

DECODED

I hear your words, and yet am saddened rightly
By dark parentheses that lie between
Subtly significant; for you're so sprightly,
And words say only what you think you mean.

POLITE CONTRADICTION

You know my work, you say? An anodyne
If you have found it, even, for ills that irk,
I'm glad—perhaps one fairly decent line
If you have found. . . . But you don't know my work!

RANGE

Wild is my blood. My blood is shepherd
To gentlest thoughts in me.
Can't one admire both a leopard
And an anemone?

THE TRUE AMPHITRYON

He is master of the house who gives the feast,
Or so it is reported;
And yet, to some creative minds at least,
The dictum seems distorted.
They still believe, although it may be odd,
That feasts of art are seldom spread with ease—
And only the visitation of a god
Breeds Hercules.

DANSEUSE

You were a white event
And the gray fates made you;
A musical instrument
And the music played you;
You the poised living query,
He the dark prowling answer.
You swayed Dream's willowy unwearied
Pirouetting dancer.
Caught on his arm you drooped
A swan death-stricken.
Fiercely he stooped,
Languidly you would quicken.
Flung his arm's length you twirled,
Floated, bowed,
Sank like a fountain furled
In a pool of cloud.
Tip-toe you twinkling ran,
The flight all feigning;
Wove with your arms a man
For your disdain;
Swooned to a swift embrace,
Reclined on air, whirled wide,
Regained with perfect grace
Your preening pride. . .

Beyond the net of light
On your lilied glory
The audience, half in night,
Sniffed allegory,
But my eyes from the stage were caught
By a throat, a shoulder,

A woman's profile wrought
To daze the beholder.
Erect she sat, so white
While the rhythms mazed her,
Her hands to her breast clutched tight,
You could see they crazed her.
Then her escort turned to speak;
I flinched him turning,
His eye, his brow, his cheek
Such a tragic burning.
Thin-lipped she glanced one glance;
What he now ceased saying
I had lost in the last of your dance
And the music playing.
Pygmalion's miracle!
What fate had tied her
To the gentleman burning in Hell
Who sat beside her?

HARLEM

I WANT to sing Harlem on an ebony flute
While trap-drums ruffle to a crash and blare,
With a clear note
From the sylvan throat
Of a clarinet—of a clarinet!
God and brute, black god and brute,
Grinning, brooding in the murk air,
Moons of flame and suns of jet,
Hurricane joy and dumb despair.
Vermilion, black and peacock-blue,
Pink, plum-purple, zig-zag green—
I want to sing Harlem with a paint-box, too,
Shaking out color like a tambourine—
Want a red
Like furious fire;
Want a black
Like midnight mire;
Want a gold
Like golden wire;
Want a silver
Like Heaven entire
And God a-playing at His own front door
On a slide-trombone with a conical bore!

Those buildings lean, those buildings lean,
They sway and shuffle to the streets between!
Fly-drumming drones, and drums make trouble.
(Crushed ruffs, long rolls, single and double!)
Wild with the riot of wood and brass
The blues and the peart high yallers pass
While cow-bell, buzz-rattle, piccolo squeal
Clank and riot through a wild-eyed reel.

Xylophones, bells, and the weird kazoo
Drown the trumpets and the tubas, too,
Drown out the tuba with a field-hand song
Patting juba to a dinner-gong,
And the saxophone sets steel and stone
Jigging into tune with a grinding groan. . . .

Oh, roll Jo'dan, Jo'dan roll!
Swing dat gal—O mah soul!
A-all up and down de whole Creation
Still dreamin' ob de old plantation;
Young folks play in de sun all day,—
(Possum, pone, an' de cane, an' de cotton!)
Hey, mah rabbit's foot! Ghos's go 'way!
(Good times dah am not fo'gotten!)
Rozzum on de bow! Come seben, come 'leben!
Gwine ter fly
All ober God's hebben!

But I want to sing Harlem. . . .
I want to sing Harlem soft and south,
Her dusky day with a rose in its mouth,
Her noon of the Islands of the Seas,
Her flaunting fruits from the Caribbees
Where palm-leaves wave from stucco walls
And street and square hear mellow calls
And meridian sun is blazing down
On the chalk-white glare of a tropic town.
Orange and bougainvillea red
Flame from scarf and turbaned head,
Purple—paw-paw yellow—vie
From basket-bearers swaying by;
A hot breeze blows,

Tossed water flows

From fountains white in the patios;

Like a flaming bloom each negress goes. . . .

What the Indies dream all Harlem knows.

Yet I want to tell of Harlem as a tale is told

By a bleary wizard moldering-old,

Mumbling his beard to a ruined moon,

Moaning along in a sing-song croon.

For noise and color in a hurricane

Pass to a drip of silvery rain;

The moon spills gold on Harlem River,

The ripples gleam like coins a-quiver;

Burnt on the night in Dahomey bronze

The moon is a god through banyan fronds

A-flutter in ghostly jungle-glades.

Flares and fades

All violence from this moon-filled mere;

Only grief and calm are here. . . .

No! Fetish, charm and exorcism

Float like smoke from a black abysm,

Thicken like smoke from eastward rolled.

Land of Ophir, Land of Gold,

Land of half the earth a-prowl,

Of mottled shield and assegai,

Kraals and jungles dark and foul,

Sluggish rivers half a stye,

Moon-dawn on that Afric night,

(All the country crazed with light)

Darkness breathing deep and dense

Thick with death and pestilence! . . .

Then fades, and flares, and fades once more
That black volcano on a haunted shore
Where writhing shadows wail and sob.
Faint, more faint, the war-drums throb,
Great Zulu Tshaka's war-drums spent
In the gloom of a lost dark continent. . . .

So I want to sing minor, wailing low
And full of all the grief I know,
The grief I know;
Oh, I want to sing Harlem quaint and sad
And full of all the trouble I've had,
The trouble I've had. . . .

But the buildings quiver and dance like mad.
Walls of windows, walls of doors,
Delicatessens, clothing-stores,
Drug-store, pool-room, turn them loose
On the Ringtail, Florida and Beale Street Blues;
Antillean flats take up the dance
In a crack-a-knuckle, crack-a-knuckle shuffling trance;
They reel,
They roll,
They sway across my soul;
They summon the oboes of the East to come,
The clown brass-band, the Indian drum,
The one-stringed bow, the antelope horn,
The bamboo whistle to wail forlorn,
The weird marimba of Zululand
To shudder and strum beneath my hand!

And I want to sing Harlem. . . .
Oh, I want to sing Harlem wild alive
In Nineteen Hundred Twenty Five;

The Negro City, the dream-book town,
Metropolis of black and brown;
Number-gambling round the clock,
Bones and razors on every block,
Coon-can raging, thirst assuaging,
Egypt-rouged and all-engaging,
Drinking, dancing on till day,
Swarming to church or *cabaret*,
Whirlwind-gay with leopard power,
Rolling eyes in a Holy Ghost shower,
Lazing, laughing 'long the street,
Stepping high, stepping high,
Shaken with the shuffles from head to feet—
Mansions in the sky!

No, fold your wings, fantastical things!
For I want to sing Harlem. . . .
I want to sing Harlem as a dead man sings
Low in the mould, so low, so low
Only the nails of his coffin know;
Safe and sound, safe and sound,
Shoveled six foot underground,
Locked in the loam for strange rebirth,
Pressed to the breast of his Mammy Earth. . . .

Oh, does she croon, "O dark delight,
O you my panther, proud by night,
My lashing tiger painted bright,
My Paradise Bird, my Mournin' Dove,
Parading, moaning of your love;
O my sun-blind eagle, sailing,
My harp of winds and seas a-wailing,
My groping mole-like slumberous soul,

My awful patience deep in dole—
O you my quickening, you my birth
Of richest beauty, wildest mirth,
My pulse through whom my whole creation's
Swayed to the breathing of my breast,
Whipped up to the carol of the constellations,
On all my urges nourished best—
O child of the wild, of the womb of night,
Rest, and dream, my dark delight!”

· EXEQUIES FOR P. T. BARNUM

BEAT the bells of Bethel for P. T. Barnum;
 Barnum's out of Jail!
Boss of the Universal Yankee Nation,
 Nonpareil Showman of the Whole Creation,
Screaming rocket of blue-black heavens
 With a gold spreadeagle trail.
Blare and ballyhoo for P. T. Barnum;
 Barnum's out of Jail!

Earth was the Jail where he dreamed of Wonders,
 As children dream of cakes;
Now like lions leashed he leads the Thunders,
 The Lightnings are his snakes.
He placards in fire on the gray moon's granites,
 "The Greatest Act in the Void:
See the Juggler of Suns and Moons and Planets,
 Of Star and Asteroid!"

In brash young days when he sold saleratus,
 Molasses, ten-penny nails,
Who could have guessed at his future status,
 His Mermaids, Snow-white Whales,
Industrious Fleas, Pink-eyed Albinos,
 Dwarfs and Dissolving Views,
Glassblowers, Giants, Giraffes and Rhinos,
 All in the Front Page News!

Canal Street glowed like a bower in Arden,
 Broadway seemed a golden trail,
When Jenny Lind, at Castle Garden,
 Trilled like a nightingale.

Buckingham Palace thrilled to glory, a
Glittering court struck dumb,
When Barnum bowed to Queen Victoria
With the General—Tom Thumb!

Now the Great Museum—like the Tower of Babel—
Is a fiery cloud of dawn,
Iranistan but a golden fable—
The “Greatest Show” is gone.
Commodore Nutt and Little Eva
From life are long released;
The Asian Caravan sleeps with Shiva
Remote in the mystic East.

But at night over Bridgeport, free from trammels
Of drably actual fact,
There’s a cloud parade of zebras, camels,
And Jumbo’s marvelous act;
Rope-dancers, gymnasts, droll distortions
Of nature rise and shine—
Till the trains all wiggle with weird contortions
On the dusk New Haven Line.

Down Danbury way there’s a roar of cannon
(Albeit a ghostly roar!)
As a spectral Marshal cheers each man on
His march from the old jail door.
Six horses ramp at a golden chariot,
The throne of old P. T.,
Hallooing cowboys whirl the lariat,
Gypsies shout jubilee,

And Barnum, chewing a grand Havana,
Bows to the left and right—

A phantom too, with a youthful manner—

The pageant fades from sight. . .

Then beat those bells! Hail the unreturning

Boss of the Yankee Nation!

Swing them, ring them! His star is burning

Bright over All Creation.

Earth was his Jail, where he dreamed of glories

Astounding every eye;

Now heaven is hushed by his whopping stories,

His Big Top's all the sky;

His posters are splashed on the gray moon's granites

With "*Greatest Act in the Vast:*

*See DARKNESS, THE DRAGON, Who Gulps Down Planets,
Sun, Moon, and Stars at Last!"*

GHOST OF AN OPERA HOUSE

GONE are dim gas in crystal chandelier,
Flamboyant frescoes, flickering footlight-jets,
Weber and Verdi, solos and duets,
Blue smoke, and breaths of whiskey and of beer,
The curtain's gaily-coloured gondolier,
The garish grandeur of the various sets!
Now, in the empty street, a white moon whets
The edge of night, and sparkling stars appear.

There lies the gulch where Matt McMan struck gold,
And sluiced his claim, and gathered in his dust—
Whence sprang the hillside-mines and streets of hell,
Masonic Hall and Opera House of old,
And that vast Franklin stove, since fallen to rust,
That jewelled the lobby of the Elite Hotel!

BALLAD OF THE BLUNDERBUSS

A DUSTY, rusty blunderbuss
That hung upon a nail
Was once the martial property
Of ruddy Major Quayle.

So old a desiccated sight,
It might have marched with George
And sentried in the freezing night
At famous Valley Forge.

He had indeed been known to tell
His great-grandfather bore it,
An heirloom he'd not give or sell
Till all else went before it.

Above the great wide mantel's jut,
Flanked by a powder-horn,
It graced the old Connecticut
White home where Quayle was born.

Around his house the Major chored,
Retired from the Line
But still as straight as though a board
Were clamped along his spine.

He who had trailed the proud Cheyenne,
He who had fought the Sioux
Afar from all New England's ken
Before his youth was through,

The Autumn colours would accost
Each year, and say, "I think

I read an omen in the frost
That I should take a drink;

“For bones are old and winter’s cold
And all my loves are flown
And all the leaves are red and gold
And I must drink alone!

“All summer I’ve got up at seven
And gone to bed at nine,
And soon the golden stairs to heaven
Before me rise and shine;

“And I have stalked the red Cheyenne
And I have fought the Sioux—
A drink in celebration’s then
The least that I can do!”

The cellar steps were steep and rough,
Rheumatic was the leg,
But Major Quayle with many a puff
Hoist up the wooden keg

And trundled it across the floor,
And then rocked forth and back,
As in the moonlight by his door
He swigged the apple-jack;

And ever grew the mystery
Of all he stowed away,
While in some far phrontistery
His thoughts were making hay,

Till, noting that the moon was full
As he would be full soon,
He bawled, by habit, like a bull
That he would shoot the moon.

A satisfying lunar rite,
Since hillsides stained with red
Of Autumn called his blood to fight
The Sioux again, he said.

And on your shoulder he would lean
And with his finger trace
The way the hiccup—moon, I mean,
Revealed an Indian face.

Says he, "It is the noble red
Returning in the skies—
My old and glorious foe!" he said,
"Blank-blank his blank-blank eyes!

"If I can sight as I could sight,
If I can draw a bead,
You'll need a lantern home tonight,
There'll be no moon indeed!"

He rose redundant from his chair,
His hair a silvery muss,
And fumbling by the fireplace there
Unhitched the blunderbuss;

And trundling of the keg outside
With emphasis sat soon
Upon its end, and beamed with pride
And squinted at the moon.

The moon was high and round and white
And on it one might trace
The shadowy spots that blur by night
To something like a face.

“Ha, ha! my friend,” quoth Major Quayle,
And shrewdly shook his head,
“I’ve camped too long upon your trail
To miss a hostile red!

“Your corn-tepees on every hill,
Your signal smokes so blue
Are in my eyes and nostrils till
There’s just one thing to do!

“Hail then, thou war-chief in the sky—!”
The trigger and his head
He’d cock; and then, if one were by,
Best lure him off to bed;

Though never was that victory won
Without stiff argument,
So fierce he wrestled at his gun
Reiterate with intent.

We thought he had no powder near,
We knew he had no shot;
That ancient weapon seemed so queer
’Twould burst, as like as not—

’Twould never stand but one discharge,
With dangerous results. . .
But one chill night the moon was large
And in the Major’s pulse

Were guidon, drum, and sabre-flash;
And thus he sought full soon
A well-concealed and private *cache*
So he could shoot the moon.

He whistled Garry Owen loud,
He sat upon his keg,
He watched the moon come out from cloud,
And slapped his twingeing leg,

And rammed the powder and the shot
With rusted ramrod down,
And gloated how at last he'd got
The best of all the town

Beneath his mountain twinkling bright;
And, in his scant apparel,
He grasped the butt, and took a sight
To fix the weaving barrel.

Quoth he, "My glorious ancient foe,
Aim all your arrowy light;
But by this ancient weapon know
I've just begun to fight!

"Ho-ho! Blank-blank ye! Here's to Gore!
Strike up the Company tune!"
Then came a sudden blinding roar—
And he had shot the moon.

Snub Davis called across to me
From Mike McCann's saloon,
"I rather think by *that*," says he,
"The Major's shot the moon!"

Uptrail along the mountainside
We made our hasty way,
And there before his door in pride
The heroic Major lay.

His arm was broken, and his wrist,
But oh his eyes were bright!
He shook at us his one good fist
With "*No more moon tonight!*"

"Exposure" was the doctor's word,
The arm would soon have set—
So after all that had occurred
We never could forget.

The nail above the fireplace still
Protrudes, but long to us,
Naught else the vacant place shall fill
Of that old blunderbuss.

To smithereens it must have blown,
And barely missed his head,
When Major Quayle that night alone
Outfaced the hostile red,

And broached defiance to the sky,
And called the Company tune,
And with dread lightning in his eye
Essayed to shoot the moon!

JESSE JAMES

(A Design in Red and Yellow for a Nickel Library)

JESSE JAMES was a two-gun man,
 (Roll on, Missouri!)
Strong-arm chief of an outlaw clan.
 (From Kansas to Illinois!)
He twirled an old Colt forty-five;
 (Roll on, Missouri!)
They never took Jesse James alive.
 (Roll, Missouri, roll!)

Jesse James was King of the Wes';
 (Cataracks in the Missouri!)
He'd a di'mon' heart in his lef' breas';
 (Brown Missouri rolls!)
He'd a fire in his heart no hurt could stifle;
 (Thunder, Missouri!)
Lion eyes an' a Winchester rifle.
 (Missouri, roll down!)

Jesse James rode a pinto hawse;
Come at night to a water-cawse;
Tetched with the rowel that pinto's flank;
She sprung the torrent from bank to bank.

Jesse rode through a sleepin' town;
Looked the moonlit street both up an' down;
Crack-crack-crack, the street ran flames
An' a great voice cried, "I'm Jesse James!"

Hawse an' afoot they're after Jess!
 (Roll on, Missouri!)

Spurrin' an' spurrin'—but he's gone Wes'.

(Brown Missouri rolls!)

He was ten foot tall when he stood in his boots;

(Lightnin' light the Missouri!)

More'n a match fer sich galoots.

(Roll, Missouri, roll!)

Jesse James rode outa the sage;

Roun' the rocks come the swayin' stage;

Straddlin' the road a giant stan's

An' a great voice bellers, "Throw up yer han's!"

Jesse raked in the di'mon' rings,

The big gold watches an' the yuther things;

Jesse divvied 'em then an' thar

With a cryin' child had lost her mar.

The U. S. troopers is after Jess;

(Roll on, Missouri!)

Their hawses sweat foam, but he's gone Wes';

(Hear Missouri roar!)

He was broad as a b'ar, he'd a ches' like a drum,

(Wind an' rain through Missouri!)

An' his red hair flamed like Kingdom Come.

(Missouri down to the sea!)

Jesse James all alone in the rain

Stopped an' stuck up the Eas'-boun' train;

Swayed through the coaches with horns an' a tail,

Lit out with the bullion an' the registered mail.

Jess made 'em all turn green with fright

Quakin' in the aisles in the pitch-black night;

An' he give all the bullion to a pore ole tramp
Campin' nigh the cuttin' in the dirt an' damp.

The whole U. S. is after Jess;

(Roll on, Missouri!)

The son-of-a-gun, if he ain't gone Wes';

(Missouri to the sea!)

He could chaw cold iron an' spit blue flame;

(Cataracks down the Missouri!)

He rode on a catamount he'd larned to tame.

(Hear that Missouri roll!)

Jesse James rode into a bank;

Give his pinto a tetch on the flank;

Jumped the teller's window with an awful crash;

Heaved up the safe an' twirled his mustache;

He said, "So long, boys!" He yelped, "So long!

Feelin' porely today—I ain't feelin' strong!"

Rode right through the wall a-goin' crack-crack-crack—

Took the safe home to mother in a gunny-sack.

They're creepin', they're crawlin', they're stalkin' Jess;

(Roll on, Missouri!)

They's a rumor he's gone much further Wes';

(Roll, Missouri, roll!)

They's word of a cayuse hitched to the bars

(Ruddy clouds on Missouri!)

Of a golden sunset that busts into stars.

(Missouri, roll down!)

Jesse James rode hell fer leather;

He was a hawse an' a man together;

In a cave in a mountain high up in air
He lived with a rattlesnake, a wolf, an' a bear.

Jesse's heart was as sof' as a woman;
Fer guts an' stren'th he was sooper-human;
He could put six shots through a woodpecker's eye
And take in one swaller a gallon o' rye.

They sought him here an' they sought him there,
(*Roll on, Missouri!*)
But he strides by night through the ways of the air;
(*Brown Missouri rolls!*)
They say he was took an' they say he is dead,
(*Thunder, Missouri!*)
But he ain't—he's a sunset overhead!
(*Missouri down to the sea!*)

Jesse James was a Hercules.
When he went through the woods he tore up the trees.
When he went on the plains he smoked the groun'
An' the hull lan' shuddered fer miles aroun'.

Jesse James wore a red bandanner
That waved on the breeze like the Star Spangled Banner;
In seven states he cut up dadoes.
He's gone with the buffler an' the desperadoes.

Yes, Jesse James was a two-gun man
(*Roll on, Missouri!*)
The same as when this song began;
(*From Kansas to Illinois!*)
An' when you see a sunset bust into flames
(*Lightnin' light the Missouri!*)
Or a thunderstorm blaze—that's Jesse James!
(*Hear that Missouri roll!*)

MASTER OF THE FLYING CASTLE

WHEN white canvas towered in tiers
From the sealine, cloud by cloud;
When from roadstead out to offing
All the sea gleamed thick with fame,
In from Java and the East,
From the lairs of god and beast,
With a wake like mermaids dancing,
Aymar's "Flying Castle" came.

She was laid in Port o' Moonbeams,
She was launched in Noah's prime,
She seemed older than the triremes
As we peered from headland grass.
In her hold was gold and cedar
Out of Tarshish, Tyre and Edar
And she trailed a bannered sunset
On a tide like burning glass.

Aymar, Master of the Cove,
Every salty shipwright knew,
Everywhere a rope was rove
Or a mate signed on a crew;
Trim white house with hollyhocks,
Walk of shells and hedge of box;
Meet him rolling down to harbor,
Buttons blazing from his blue.

Bought a black in Mozambique,
Some outlandish port of call;
Brought him home that very week
When we watched her tower so tall;
Be a gardener for the lady,

Keep her little garden close.
How we watched him weed of mornings
With the bangle in his nose.
Soon enough the "Flying Castle"
Faced the seas where Auster blows.

Talked like Choctaw, did the black;
Lifted gentle dark dog's eyes.
But we scouted through a crack
In his shanty—and were wise.
He would hold the withered charm
High with one long apeline arm,
Muttering, moaning, as he swayed—
Till we crowded close together,
Hurrying homeward—yes, and prayed!

When the Autumn storms were brewing
And the trees were leaved with flame,
Like a lover to proud wooing
Home the "Flying Castle" came;
Goblins jiggling in her rigging
Were the freezing flaws of spray;
Every samphire-bearded Triton
Greenly hailed her on her way.

Plunging, rearing like a stallion
In the trough and through the crest;
Bulking golden as a galleon
On the witchcraft of the West;
Purple night in all the shrouds
Of her tropic-tinted clouds,
Till the headland flowered its beacon
And the Fiend stood manifest!

Mumbling more and more by fits,
White of eyeball rolled askance,
Worked the black's weird secret wits,
Till we feared and fled his glance,
Till one night the dark infernal
Ritual rose to dim nocturnal
Toil by moonlight—oil and kindlings—
And a trancelike moonlight dance.

Blood was smeared upon the portal.
(Only voodooos understand.)
Out of terror stark and mortal,
Shriek on shriek—a smothering hand.
Then the crackling rose to roaring
And the swarms of sparks went soaring
And the house flared like a pharos
To the "Castle," close off land.

.

Aymar's face was gray and shrunken,
Aymar's voice was but a croak,
Aymar's eyes were charred and sunken,
But they burned you when he spoke;
Tottering palsied, as if drunken,
Through hushed streets he did not see;
And the "Flying Castle" rotting,
Sunk and sand-filled, off the quay.

THE HORSE THIEF

THERE he moved, cropping the grass at the purple canyon's lip.

His mane was mixed with the moonlight that silvered his
snow-white side,

For the moon sailed out of a cloud with the wake of a spectral
ship,

I crouched and I crawled on my belly, my lariat coil looped
wide.

Dimly and dark the mesas broke on the starry sky.

A pall covered every color of their gorgeous glory at noon.
I smelt the yucca and mesquite, and stifled my heart's quick
cry,

And wormed and crawled on my belly to where he moved
against the moon!

Some Moorish barb was that mustang's sire. His lines were
beyond all wonder.

From the prick of his ears to the flow of his tail he ached
in my throat and eyes.

Steel and velvet grace! As the prophet says, God had "clothed
his neck with thunder."

Oh, marvelous with the drifting cloud he drifted across the
skies!

And then I was near at hand—crouched, and balanced, and
cast the coil;

And the moon was smothered in cloud, and the rope
through my hands with a rip!

But somehow I gripped and clung, with the blood in my brain
aboil—

With a turn round the rugged tree-stump there on the
purple canyon's lip.

Right into the stars he reared aloft, his red eye rolling and raging.

He whirled and sunfished and lashed, and rocked the earth to thunder and flame.

He squealed like a regular devil horse. I was haggard and spent and aging—

Roped clean, but almost storming clear, his fury too fierce to tame.

And I cursed myself for a tenderfoot moon-dazzled to play the part,

But I was doubly desperate then, with the possé pulled out from town,

Or I'd never have tried it. I only knew I must get a mount and a start.

The filly had snapped her foreleg short. I had had to shoot her down.

So there he struggled and strangled, and I snubbed him around the tree.

Nearer, a little nearer—hoofs planted, and lolling tongue—Till a sudden slack pitched me backward. He reared right on top of me.

Mother of God—that moment! He missed me . . . and up I swung.

Somehow, gone daft completely and clawing a bunch of his mane,

As he stumbled and tripped in the lariat, there I was—up and astride

And cursing for seven counties! And the mustang? *Just insane!*

Crack-bang! went the rope; we cannoned off the tree—then—gods, that ride!

A rocket—that's all, a rocket! I dug with my teeth and nails.

Why we never hit even the high spots (though I hardly
remember things,)

But I heard a monstrous booming like a thunder of flapping
sails

When he spread—well, *call* me a liar!—when he spread
those wings, those wings!

So white that my eyes were blinded, thick-feathered and wide
unfurled,

They beat the air into billows. We sailed, and the earth
was gone.

Canyon and desert and mesa withered below, with the world.

And then I knew that mustang; for I—was Bellerophon!

Yes, glad as the Greek, and mounted on a horse of the elder
gods,

With never a magic bridle or a fountain-mirror nigh!

My chaps and spurs and holster must have looked it? What's
the odds?

I'd a leg over lightning and thunder, careering across the
sky!

And forever streaming before me, fanning my forehead cool,

Flowed a mane of molten silver; and just before my thighs

(As I gripped his velvet-muscle ribs, while I cursed myself
for a fool)

The steady pulse of those pinions—their wonderful fall
and rise!

The bandanna I bought in Bowie blew loose and whipped
from my neck.

My shirt was stuck to my shoulders and ribboning out
behind.

The stars were dancing, wheeling and glancing, dipping with
smirk and beck.

The clouds were flowing, dusking and glowing. We rode
a roaring wind.

We soared through the silver starlight to knock at the planets'
gates.

New shimmering constellations came whirling into our ken.
Red stars and green and golden swung out of the void that
waits

For man's great last adventure; the Signs took shape—
and then

I knew the lines of that Centaur the moment I saw him come!
The musical-box of the heavens all around us rolled to a
tune

That tinkled and chimed and trilled with silver sounds that
struck you dumb,

As if some archangel were grinding out the music of the
moon.

Melody-drunk on the Milky Way, as we swept and soared
hilarious,

Full in our pathway, sudden he stood—the Centaur of the
Stars,

Flashing from head and hoofs and breast! I knew him for
Sagittarius.

He reared, and bent and drew his bow. He crouched as a
boxer spars.

Flung back on his haunches, weird he loomed—then leapt—
and the dim void lightened.

Old White Wings shied and swerved aside, and fled from
the splendor-shod.

Through a flashing welter of worlds we charged. I knew why
my horse was frightened.

He *had* two faces—a dog's and a man's—that Babylonian
god!

Also, he followed us real as fear. Ping! went an arrow past.

My broncho buck-jumped, humping high. We plunged

. . . I guess that's all!

I lay on the purple canyon's lip, when I opened my eyes at
last—

Stiff and sore and my head like a drum, but I broke no
bones in the fall.

So you know—and now you may string me up. Such was the
way you caught me.

Thank you for letting me tell it straight, though you never
could greatly care.

For I took a horse that wasn't mine! . . . But there's one
the heavens brought me,

And I'll hang right happy, because I know he is waiting
for me up there.

From creamy muzzle to cannon-bone, by God, he's a peerless
wonder!

He is steel and velvet and furnace-fire, and death's su-
premiest prize;

And never again shall be roped on earth that neck that is
"clothed with thunder" . . .

String me up, Dave! Go dig my grave! *I rode him across
the skies!*

THE SKATER OF GHOST LAKE

GHOST LAKE's a dark lake, a deep lake and cold:
Ice black as ebony, frostily scrolled;
Far in its shadows a faint sound whirrs;
Steep stand the sentineled deep, dark firs.

A brisk sound, a swift sound, a ring-tinkle-ring;
Flit-flit—a shadow, with a stoop and a swing,
Flies from a shadow through the crackling cold.
Ghost Lake's a deep lake, a dark lake and old!

Leaning and leaning, with a stride and a stride,
Hands locked behind him, scarf blowing wide,
Jeremy Randall skates, skates late,
Star for a candle, moon for a mate.

Black is the clear glass now that he glides,
Crisp is the whisper of long lean strides,
Swift is his swaying—but pricked ears hark.
None comes to Ghost Lake late after dark!

Cecily only—yes, it is she!
Stealing to Ghost Lake, tree after tree,
Kneeling in snow by the still lake side,
Rising with feet winged, gleaming, to glide.

Dust of the ice swirls. Here is his hand.
Brilliant his eyes burn. Now, as was planned,
Arm across arm twined, laced to his side,
Out on the dark lake lightly they glide.

Dance of the dim moon, a rhythmical reel,
A swaying, a swift tune—skurr of the steel;

Moon for a candle, maid for a mate,
Jeremy Randall skates, skates late.

Black as if lacquered the wide lake lies;
Breath is a frost-fume, eyes seek eyes;
Souls are a sword-edge tasting the cold.
Ghost Lake's a deep lake, a dark lake and old!

Far in the shadows hear faintly begin
Like a string pluck-plucked of a violin,
Muffled in mist on the lake's far bound,
Swifter and swifter, a low singing sound!

Far in the shadows and faint on the verge
Of blue cloudy moonlight, see it emerge,
Flit-flit—a phantom, with a stoop and a swing . . .
Ah, it's a night bird, burdened of wing!

Pressed close to Jeremy, laced to his side,
Cecily Culver, dizzy you glide.
Jeremy Randall sweepingly veers
Out on the dark ice far from the piers.

“Jeremy!” “Sweetheart?” “What do you fear?”
“Nothing, my darling,—nothing is here!”
“Jeremy?” “Sweetheart?” “What do you flee?”
“Something—I know not; something I see!”

Swayed to a swift stride, brisker of pace,
Leaning and leaning, they race and they race;
Ever that whirring, that crisp sound thin
Like a string pluck-plucked of a violin;

Ever that swifter and low singing sound
Sweeping behind them, winding them round;
Gasp of their breath now that chill flakes fret;
Ice black as ebony—blacker—like jet!

Ice shooting fangs forth—sudden—like spears;
Crackling of lightning—a roar in their ears!
Shadowy, a phantom swerves off from its prey . . .
No, it's a night bird flit-flits away!

Low-winging moth-owl, home to your sleep!
Ghost Lake's a still lake, a cold lake and deep
Faint in its shadows a far sound whirrs.
Black stand the ranks of its sentinel firs.

THE NEGRO COWBOY

Or "Chuck Wagon Sam's" Lament for "Golden River"

I HAD a hawse named Golden Rivah,
Golden Rivah was mah hawse's name;
Ride 'm on de range, you could ride fo' evah,
Ride fo' evah twell de Jedgement came.

Foot was light as a leaf a'fallin',
Haid held high lak a wil' elk deer;
Down in de corral you could heah 'm callin',
Heah 'm callin' when mah step drew neah.

Eye so bright as a quail's a-shinin',
Big, sof', brown, lak an antelope doe;
Whirl aroun' yo knee when de ropes was twinin',
Ropes was twinin' in de round-up show.

Fork 'm, an' you moved lak a cloud a-flowin';
Laigs had springs lak an ol' jack-hare;
Eahs aflickah, an' his nose was knowin',
Nose was knowin' all de smells was theah.

*O banjo, banjo, plinka-plinka-plink,
Banjo, strum an' strum!
Tell de boys
How Golden Rivah
Run to Kingdom Come!*

Now lak as not you boys all know
Ah rode de herd thoo sun an' snow;
Ah rode de herd one starry night
When all de sky was a-full of light.

Steers was res'less as could be;
Golden Rivah nudge mah knee;
"Dere's boun' to be, onless you heed,"
He says to me, "a big stampede."

An' ah leans an' ah says to Golden Rivah,
Golden Rivah was mah hawse's name,
"Come to de wuss, we kin run fo' evah,
Run fo' evah lak a flyin' flame!

"Ah knows you, hawse,—you is young an' willin';
Trus' ol' Sam'll keep you safe an' soun'!"
Den de herd riz up an' all a-started millin',
Started millin', an' dey won't lay down.

Hoof up, pawin',—eve'y horn a-tossin',
Eyeballs rollin' lak de sea is white;
Trot, turn, trot; nevah heed yo bossin';
Good Lawd knowin' what dey smells by night!

Rawhide crackin', we was ridin', ridin',
Herdin', callin',—but it ain't no use.
Heah come thundah thoo de dahk a-stridin'
Heah come lightnin'—an' de herd busts loose.

Ah press mah knee intuh Golden Rivah,
Trottin' all ashivah thoo de pourin' rain:
"Quick now, hawse, you gotta prove yo clevah!"
Dat herd come arumble lak a railroad train!

*O banjo, banjo, plink-a-plunk, plink-a-plunk,
Banjo, pro-ceed;
Tell de boys how Golden Rivah
Run dat stampede!*

We went so fas' ah could not think,
We zipped thoo black lak a bucket o' ink;
De win' was a-blowin' mighty guns;
Dat herd run lak de thundah runs.

Low on de plain a line o' light
Seemed a-growin on mah sight.
"Good Lawd," ah prayed, "oh, save ouah souls,—
An' please watch out fo' gopher holes!"

An' ah leans an' ah prays to Golden Rivah,
"Golden Rivah, ef you gits us thoo,
Ain't gwine be no bit ner rope fo' evah,
Bridle, saddle, ner no cinch on you!"

Den ah laid so flat I was yankin' leathah;
De rumble o' de herd in de rain was drown';
We flewed lak a comic—hey! we split de weathah—
Bus' thoo sto'm an' lightnin' inta sight an' soun'

Of a great camp-meetin' 'at was monst'ous scary!
Seed deah feathehs an' deah wah-paint, an' ah heahed 'em cry;
Fo' we jolted to a trot on de Golden Prairie
Whah de Injuns go when de Injuns die!

"O Lawd," ah remahks, "yo' is mis-di-rected,
Reffunce to de folks ah had wished to see!
Askin' you pahdon, dis am onexpected,
Awful onexpected to mah hawse an' me!"

O ban-jo,
High an' low
Ring an' sing an' soun'!
Tell de boys whatall ah know
O' de Happy Huntin' Groun'!

Fo' lak as not you nevah seen
Green lak dem trees an' grass was green;
Ah seed dem Injuns eight foot high
Ride feathehed ponies thoo 'at sky!

Ah seed great herds o' buffalo
Preamble on dose plains below;
A Chief, in feathehs lak a tree,
Says, "How!", an' hol's his han' to me.

Den he casts his eye ovah Golden Rivah
Standin', nose aquivah, with his haid held high,
Snuffin' at de breeze blowin' cool fo' evah,
Cool fo' evah undah shinin' sky.

An' ah knows—ah knows—an' ah leans a-speakin'
To mah hawse 'at whickahs lak he tryin' fo' to say,
"Oh, ah's sorry, Sam!" But ah feels 'm weaken,
Fo'-foot pawin' in de proud ol' way.

So ah flung mah laig offa Golden Rivah;
Ah stood beside 'm whah dat rivah run;
Bright, all bright,—but I's all ashivah,
All am blackness whah ah seen de sun.

Big Chief lep onto Golden Rivah,
(O Golden Rivah it's mah hawse's name!)
Chief draw an arrer fum 's buckskin quivah,
Lined it at de sun in a flight lak flame.

Up along de track o' dat flyin' arrer,
High an' high dey went ridin' in de blue,
Feathehs all afluttah on a trail so narrer—
Sky cracked lightnin'—an' it let 'em thoo!

*O ban-jo
Sof' an' low!
Banjo, be dumb!
You've tol' de boys
How Golden Rivah
Come to Kingdom Come!*

An' lak as not you boys all feel
To lose a hawse 't knowed yo heel,
To lose a hawse 't knowed yo han'
Is trouble hahd to unnerstan'.

Ah foun' mahseff down in de draw,
It felt lak ah had bus' mah jaw;
Ah riz mahseff an' took a stare;
Co'se, wan't no Golden Prairie theah!

. . . Foot as light as a leaf a-fallin',
Haid held high lak a wil' elk deer;
Down in de corral you could heah 'm callin',
Heah 'm callin' when mah step drew neah—

Listen! Is it him? Is it Golden Rivah?
Golden Rivah was mah hawse's name;
Up an' down de range we would ride fo' evah,
Ride fo' evah—*But de Jedgement came!*

WHALE

*Rain, with a silver flail;
Sun, with a golden ball;
Ocean, wherein the whale
Swims minnow-small;*

*I heard the whale rejoice
And cynic sharks attend;
He cried with a purple voice,
"The Lord is my Friend!"*

*"With flanged and battering tail,
With huge and dark baleen,'
He said, 'Let there be Whale
In the Cold and Green!'*

*"He gave me a water spout,
A side like a harbor wall;
The Lord from cloud looked out
And planned it all.*

*"With glittering crown atilt
He leaned on a glittering rail;
He said, 'Where Sky is spilt,
Let there be Whale.'*

*"Tier upon tier of wings
Blushed and blanched and bowed;
Phalanxed fiery things
Cried in the cloud;*

*"Million-eyed was the mirk
At the plan not understood;
But the Lord looked on his work
And saw it was good.*

“He gave me marvelous girth
For the curve of back and breast,
And a tiny eye of mirth
To hide His jest.

“He made me a floating hill,
A plunging deep-sea mine.
This was the Lord’s will;
The Lord is Divine.

“I magnify his name
In earthquake and eclipse,
In weltering molten flame
And wrecks of ships,

“In waves that lick the moon;
I, the plow of the sea!
I am the Lord’s boon,
The Lord made me!”

The sharks barked from beneath,
As the great whale rollicked and roared,
“Yes, and our grinning teeth,
Was it not the Lord?”

Then question pattered like hail
From fishes large and small.
“The Lord is mighty,” said Whale,
“The Lord made all!

“His is a mammoth jest
Life may never betray;
He has laid it up in His breast
Till Judgment Day;

“But high when combers foam
And tower their last of all,
My power shall haul you home
Through Heaven wall.

“A trumpet then in the gates,
To the ramps a thundering drum,
I shall lead you where He waits
For His Whale to come.

“Where His cloudy seat is placed
On high in an empty dome,
I shall trail the Ocean abased
In chains of foam,

“Unwieldy, squattering dread;
Where the blazing cohorts stand
At last I shall lift my head
As it feels His hand.

“Then wings with a million eyes
Before mine eyes shall quail:
‘Look you, all Paradise,
I was His Whale!’ ”

I heard the Whale rejoice,
As he splayed the waves to a fan;
“And the Lord shall say with His Voice,
‘*Leviathan!*’ ”

“The Lord shall say with His Tongue,
‘Now let all Heaven give hail
To my Jest when I was young,
To my very Whale.’ ”

*Then the Whale careened in the Sea,
He floundered with flailing tail;
Flourished and rollicked he,
“Aha! Mine Empery!
For the Lord said, ‘Let Whale Be!’
And there Was Whale!”*

AKHENATEN

(Pharoah of Egypt; Son of Amenophis the Magnificent)

IN THE remotest dusk of history
He saw one God above all gods endure
In the sun of heaven, one strange sublimity,
Source of all living things, one cause and cure—
Not mere effulgence and material heat,
But the indwelling of a paraclete.

The fine green scarabs of his father's reign
Bear graved accounts of festival, oblation,
And ceremony. These the son thought vain
Unless to Aten, Lord of all Creation,
Whose gross, deceitful shade was Amon-Ra.
"Adoring with their wings thy sacred ka

"The birds fly in their haunts; the fishes be
Dazed with the bright profusion of thy beams
Even in the deeps of the green-glimmering sea!"
He sings; and when he died, slain by his dreams,
The plotting priesthood triumphed with their guile
And left his name no trace, and called him vile.

But beneath crescent cliffs there lay a bay
And a small island, where Akhenaten made
A city for the chosen of his day,
Where all should love and no man be afraid
And the many-handed beams touch all, and bless
All equally, and wither wretchedness.

"The Aten my father 'twas who brought me here,
The City of the Horizon this shall be.

O rampart of a million cubits sheer,
Remembrancer, thou, of eternity—
O thou whom no artificer hath known,
Aid me to build! I see in thee alone!”

Ah, then the Theban triad paled and bowed,
And Khnemu doffed the twi-plumed atef crown,
And Nak, the demon-serpent of the cloud,
And the great judge, Osiris, all bowed down;
And Thoth, the ibis-headed giant, turned
Wild eyes and gnashing beak, and Isis burned

With frustrate wrath. Along the haunted road
To the pyramids, along the lonely plain
From Heliopolis’ nome, a concourse flowed,
Gods on the gods’ highway, wailing in vain
To Harmachis, the sphinx. The burial-ground
Of ancient kings throbbed with mysterious sound.

Processions of images and ghostly boats
And strange shapes striding, with heads of cat and ram
Or jackal-jaws; eyes of each beast that gloats
Widened in panic of one who breathed “I am!”;
The snake of the northwind, the barque of Ra,
Drove eastward toward the dark peninsula.

The goat-faced potter of the cataract,
Hawk, ram, and man-faced sphinxes, all fled by
Like refugees from out a city sacked,
A wave of darkness under the dark sky,
A rout of star-mist that far shepherds soon
On lonely hills saw traveling past the moon

In rolling clouds tinged with weird bloody dye
And tossed in monstrous shapes. They seemed to hear

Lowings and hissings and wilder sounds on high,
And darkness fell upon them, and great fear,
And their sheep huddled as at the khamsin's blast
As out of Egypt the gods of Egypt passed.

Yet the Horizon City slowly darkened
To a city of the grave, necropolis
Of even God—as Akhenaten harkened
Curses and wailings from a black abyss
Of slaughtered lives—because he put no trust
In spear or chariot or the loud dust

Of marching armies with their emblems flashing
O'er the lapped shields. His empire fell apart,
And Egypt's earthly might; and black waves, dashing
Their tear-floods, roared in caverns of his heart
As some seamed warrior from the east, alone,
Stood with clenched fists, imploring, at the throne:

“O King, O King of Egypt, our great Sun,
Thy cities fall as birds into the snare!
And thou hast sent us not one word—not one!”
So Palestine besought with curse and prayer,
So Syria's grief and wrath made dark the air.
But Akhenaten brooded in despair

For captured cities near Orontes' mouth,
For provinces by fierce invaders torn,
Despoiled and rent; for vineyards of the south,
Fire-blackened pasturage of wheat and corn;
For desperate defense and falling wall;
And yet, he prayed, “There is one God for all!”

Prayed—and put by the sword, put by the sword,
And so lay dead. Soon Harmhab took his place,

That doughty captain whom all the folk adored,
Who wrought and fought and won back for his race
Gradual sway. Then Rameses held power
And Egypt's conquest knew its zenith hour

Till, with his death, at length all fell apart,
And hordes from west and east, from south and north,
Made the land strengthless.

So our musings start
On Akhenaten. Lonely he went forth,
Lonely he died; the zealot to the last,
Cast in a mould wherein no king was cast.

The man who saw his God so face to face
All else was shadow in that blinding light;
The man who willed salvation for his race
Through happiness at last, before the night;
One who would fain have built on love alone
The welfare of a kingdom and a throne.

His name they cut from all the monuments,
Outlawed his spirit, raised their gods once more,
Resumed the old desires, the old intents.
Again I see him tread the painted floor
Between the gilded columns, in the cool
Of some high lakeward-looking vestibule.

He murmurs, "Living in Truth"—his title then.
"Living in Truth," and "Aten, I behold!"
A frail pale youth, whose body should have been
Lapped, like his mother's, in sheets of purest gold
Ere it was confined—for there a King stepped down
Of old, to doff his crown—and take his crown.

MERCHANTS FROM CATHAY

*How that
They came.*

THEIR heels slapped their bumping mules;
their fat chaps glowed.

Glory unto Mary, each seemed to wear a
crown!

Like sunset their robes were on the wide,
white road:

So we saw those mad merchants come
dusting into town!

*Of their
Beasts.*

Two paunchy beasts they rode on and two
they drove before.

May the Saints all help us, the tiger-
stripes they had!

And the panniers upon them swelled full of
stuffs and ore!

The square buzzed and jostled at a sight
so mad.

*And their
Boast.*

They bawled in their beards, and their tur-
bans they wried.

They stopped by the stalls with curvetting
and clatter.

As bronze as the bracken their necks and
faces dyed—

And a stave they sat singing, to tell us of
the matter.

*With its
Burthen*

*“For your silks, to Sugarmago! For your
dyes, to Isfahan!*

Weird fruits from the Isle o’ Lamaree!

But for magic merchandise,

For treasure-trove and spice,

*Here's a catch and a carol to the great, grand
Chan,
The King of all the Kings across the sea!*

*And
Chorus*

*"Here's a catch and a carol to the great, grand
Chan;
For we won through the deserts to his sunset
barbican;
And the mountains of his palace no Titan's
reach may span
Where he wields his seignorie!*

*A first
Stave
Fearsome.*

*"Red-as-blood skins of Panthers, so bright
against the sun
On the walls of the halls where his pillared
state is set
They daze with a blaze no man may look
upon!
And with conduits of beverage those
floors run wet!*

*And a second
Right hard
To stomach*

*"His wives stiff with riches, they sit before
him there.
Bird and beast at his feast make song and
clapping cheer.
And jugglers and enchanters, all walking on
the air,
Make fall eclipse and thunder—make
moons and suns appear!*

*And a third
Which is a
Laughable
Thing.*

*"Once the Chan, by his enemies sore-prest,
and sorely spent,
Lay, so they say, in a thicket 'neath a
tree*

Where the howl of an owl vexed his foes from
their intent:

Then that fowl for an holy bird of rever-
ence made he!

*Of the Chan's
Hunting.*

"And when he will a-hunting go, four ele-
phants of white

Draw his wheeling dais of lignum aloes
made;

And marquises and admirals and barons
of delight

All courier his chariot, in orfrayes
arrayed!

*We gape to
Hear them end,*

*"A catch and a carol to the great, grand Chan!
Pastmasters of disasters, our desert cara-
van*

*Won through all peril to his sunset barbi-
can,*

Where he wields his seignorie!

*And crowns he gave us! We end where
we began:*

*A catch and a carol to the great, grand
Chan,*

*The King of all the Kings across the
sea!"*

*And are in
Terror,*

Those mad, antic Merchants! Their striped
beasts did beat

The market-square suddenly with hooves
of beaten gold!

The ground yawned gaping and flamed be-
neath our feet.

They plunged to Pits Abysmal with their
wealth untold!

*And dread
it is
Devil's work!*

And some say the Chan himself in anger dealt
the stroke—

For sharing of his secrets with silly, com-
mon folk:

But Holy, Blessed Mary, preserve us as you
may

Lest once more those mad Merchants
come chanting from Cathay!

TAILLEFER

ON THE judgment seat of Alfred,
Acclaimed by churl and thane,
Sat Harold the son of Godwin
With the sword of Athelstane—
The Earl of the West Saxons,
With Edward in his mind,
Harold, Lord of Britain,
King of the English kind.

In Rouen fumed Duke William
And swore this should not be,
By the Mount of the Archangel,
By the saints of Normandy;
And Tostig, Harold's brother,
Northumbria's banished earl,
Spake with Harold Hardrada
And saw his fierce lip curl.

So the Norse returned to England
With fire and sword, and found
One gift from the golden Dragon—
Seven feet of English ground;
A shield wall by Gate Fulford,
Thick spears on a windy ridge,
The last of the ancient sea-kings
Routed at Stamfordbridge.

But below the Picard river
The south wind came at last
To the sails of all Duke William's ships.
His ships were sailing fast
North on the misty channel

When stars were glittering,
And under the "Mora's" lantern
A knight sang to the king:

Taillefer, Cleaver of Iron,
Bearing a name for the strong—
Yet Taillefer, youth of laughter,
Thrilling the night with a song
Of Charlemagne and Roland,
Of a horn that mocked despair,
With a voice of youth and victory—
Taillefer! Taillefer!

Brooding, the Conqueror watched him
And his rapt uplifted face,
Light of the eyes that challenged,
Freedom and strength and grace,
Merry, untouched by evil,
Open and frank and kind;
And a serpent stirred in the darkness
That filled Duke William's mind.

Through the wet wave at Pevensey
The armed host threshed to shore,
And the Duke would first have reached the land
But a light step leapt before.
First on the coast of England,
Bareheaded, with blowing hair,
Bounded that unleashed leopard,
The young knight, Taillefer.

Sudden abashed and halted
By the Conqueror's loud commands

He paused. Duke William tripped and fell,
The earth in his two hands.

"So I take seizin of England!"

He cried with a surly glare,
But caught youth's impish laughter
In the eyes of Taillefer.

Now a thane rode to King Harold
With tidings strange indeed,
And Harold marched for London
Ere the man could turn his steed,
Calling aloud to the muster
All sons of English sires;
The Dragon and the Fighting Man
Flamed southward through the shires.

And southward from London muster
And the rood in Waltham's fane
Levies pressed to the Standard
Of the troops that met the Dane,
Till they stood on the heights of Senlac
From all the shires and towns,
Battleaxe men and darters
High on a spur of the downs.

And south on the Hill of Heathland
Duke William, peering, vowed
A minster to St. Martin
Where the English gleamed like cloud.
To the blessing of Bishop Odo
Knelt men from Boulogne and Maine,
Poitevin, Breton, Picard,
That their hope be not in vain.

So the night passed. The morning
Grew gray in the chilly air.
The Conqueror summoned to his tent
The young knight Taillefer.
"Youth would go first!" He eyed him.
"Rashness best fits the fray.
Singer of songs of daring,
Lead thou the van to-day!"

With open eyes of wonder
Youth faced embittered craft.
Then, in a flash of vision,
Sudden the young knight laughed,
And a shaft of early sunlight
Struck gold from his tangled hair.
"By the banner of the Apostle,
Yea, sire!" cried Taillefer.

So beyond Telham northward
The Norman knighthood rode.
Billmen and jerkined archers
Through marsh and wasteland strode.
Toustain the White with the banner
Bright glimmering through the haze,
Odo in gleaming armour
By the Bastard of Falaise.

There was to cross the English fosse
And then the host stood still
Where that ash-woven barricade
Frowned from the sloping hill.
A burthened pause ere battle
About the hour of prime,

And sunlight burst upon the downs,
A lark began to climb,

And out from the Norman vanguard
Tossing his lance on high,
Unhelmeted, unheralded
Under the open sky,
On a charger that stepped like dancing,
With a song for all to share,
A vivid flame in the sunlight
Rode the minstrel, Taillefer.

Taillefer, Cleaver of Iron,
Bearing a name for the strong,
Yet Taillefer, lord of laughter,
Thrilling the day with a song
Of Charlemagne and Roland,
Of one hour that mocked despair,
With a glorious voice of victory—
Taillefer! Taillefer!

Swift flew the sleet of arrows
As the English trumpets blew.
Up surged the host of Normans.
Blood glinted on the dew.
Warriors of Kent and Essex
Shouted defiance back.
Hildebrand's flaming ensign
Mounted to the attack.

But he tossed his lance and caught it
As his charger caracoled,
And high over horn and battle-cry
His ringing singing rolled

Taunting, immortal, haunting,
Superb on the sunlit air,
A gauntlet flung in the teeth of Death—
Taillefer! Taillefer!

Then they saw him reel in the saddle
And clutch at the saddle bow
And the fight joined on the hill crest
With curse and clashing blow,
Till at length on a blinded Harold
The shades of Senlac close
And deep in the heart of England
Burns the spear of her foreign foes.

THERE LIVED A LADY IN MILAN

THERE lived a lady in Milan
Wrought for a madness unto Man,
A fawn Il Moro could not tame;
Her beauty unbedecked with pearls
More than all Beatrice's girls,
Her eyes a secret subtle flame.

Brocade wherein her body dressed
Was hallowed; flowers her footstep pressed
Suspired incense ere they died.
Her father, mazed with alchemy,
Wrought in his cellar ceaselessly.
She lived in quiet, gentle pride.

And by her garden in his hour
Passed Leonardo, come with power
From Florence. So he saw her face
Bending above the shriveled stalks
Of autumn on the garden walks.
And Leonardo drank her grace.

She was as if a sunset were
With fresher colours, clearer air,
And a more golden coil of cloud.
She was as though all citherns swooned
With one rich harmony, myriad-tuned,
Haunting, enchanting, pure and proud.

And Leonardo said, "Ladye,
I know not what you do to me
Who have and have not, seek nor find.
The sea-shell and the falcon's feather,

Greece and the rock and shifting weather
Have taught me many things of mind.

“My heart has taught me many things,
And so have emperors and kings,
And so have leaves and green May flies;
Yea, I have learned from bird and beast,
From slouching dwarf and ranting priest.
Yet, in the end, how am I wise?

“Though with dividers and a quill
I weave some miracle of will—
Say, that men fly—though I design
For peace or war a thousand things
Gaining applause from dukes and kings—
Though soft and deft my colours shine,

“Though my quick wit breed thunderbolts
I may not loose on all these dolts,
Things they are babes to comprehend—
Though from the crevice in stone or lime
I trace grave outlines mocking Time—
I know when I am beaten, Friend!

“Say that there lived of old a saint
Even Leonardo dared not paint,
Even Leonardo dared not draw—
Too perfect in her breathing prime
For colours to transmit to time
Or quill attempt—aye, ev’n in awe!

“Say this, cold histories, and say
I looked not on her from this day

Lest, frenzied, I destroy my art.
O golden lily—how she stands
Listening! Beauty—ah, your hands,
Your little hands tear out my heart!

“Do you not know you are so fair,
Brighter than springtime in the air?
What says your mirror to your mind?”
“Phantom,” she whispered, “do you plead
With ghostly gestures? . . . Ah, indeed,
Pity a lady deaf and blind

Since birth!” . . . Then Leonardo turned
Saluting, though the sunset burned
In nimbus round her—went his way
In daze, repeating, “God’s defect,
Even He!—and masterpiece elect!”
He never saw her from that day.

LEGEND OF MICHELOTTO

So IT befell, because the times were hard,
This Michelotto, Captain of the Guard,
Nigh to Cord Lane, in a vile drinking den
Lingered the last of Cæsar Borgia's men,
Having found beyond Viana, in the vale,
That stripped, stark, blood-laced body, prone and pale,
Fixed eyes and wolf-teeth glittering to the stars.
Thus last he saw the Duke. So from all wars,
All coil of camp and court, he fled Navarre
To live at hazard by the outlier's star
Scornful of every faction—old and grim.

This was a night when musing fell on him,
Secret in Rome, strayed lately from the sea.

Sprawled on his lousy pallet it seemed that he
Was multiplied in forms around the room
Where on the floor a lantern made the gloom
Even more invading by its little light.
Some fifteen Michelottos were that night
Regarding him from all sides of his bed.
He clutched again the wineskin, and his head
Turned slow each way; his eyes revealed their whites.

This was, perhaps, one of his troubled nights,
For suddenly that raped Venetian bride,
Caracciolo's, crouched by his bedside
With hair disheveled, eyes glaring wildly round.

One feels it discommoding that the drowned
From Tiber rise and walk, and come thus late;
Nor, boy Astorre, should you, smiling, wait

Blue by that window-grate the moon shines through.
Those emaciated wraiths that crowd round you
Forget how kindly you were used anon.

“Ecco! These two were vilest. Smilest? Smilest
Thou—thou—or thou, mine image? Fiends, begone!”
Thus, elbow-raised, the gulping sbirro cries,
His coarse dark hair fallen tangled in his eyes.

He turned again. His hand groped for the wine.
There gleamed the poniard-hilt 'twixt neck and spine
Driven home. It quivered yet. Ah, how the wan
Forehead, blood-smeared, and dark eyes of this man,
The wried mouth gaping to its gurgling cry,
Called back the Ghetto midnight. . . . How they ply
Dagger on dagger till heavily he falls!
Sparks flit from flints. Beneath the bagnio walls
Wheels the white charger, champing at his load.
Truly not thus a Captain General rode
Ere this through Rome!

So Gandia; let us hope
That Don Giovanni, captain to the Pope . . .
But no, he glimmers yonder by the wall.
He bears the head that was so swift to fall
By that back-handed blow.

The head smiles too!
The Borgia's will it was to run him through
Because his wife was soft and weak of will.

As for the poisoned sleepers, how they fill
The earth-floored lean-to—many in their throes.
The Mantuan archibishop, I suppose,
Is he who lies the straightest, Giacomo's—

The protonotary—is the stiffest pose,
Gian the cardinal looks his pained surprise . . .

The sbirro shook his mane, strained limbs to rise,
Sank back—and entered Don Alfonso's room.

High-ceiled, that great apartment in the gloom,
Save for the burning brazier, swarmed with night.
The strangler with the bowstring craves no light
However, and the fixed imperious glance
Of the cloaked Duke precludes one look askance.
Wail of all wails—O wail that rings forever!

Veined eyeballs staring, with a huge endeavor
This Don Michele Coreglia heaved upright.

Lying or sitting, 'tis no better plight,
Even with the palms pressed tight against the eyes.
Ramiro in Cesena square, the cries
Of the rebels in their dungeon, beasts at bay!

Red—as the hands press eyeballs—red as they
Who fell at Capua—is the swimming light.
The shrieking of the nuns upbraids the night . . .

“Yet,” groaned this Michelotto, swaying now
Upright, one arm across his streaming brow,
His bare feet shuffling on the earthen floor,
“Yet, thou dark man, I shall not see thee more,
King of these kakodaimons—but a king!
Ah, Cæsar, Satan, sire, if this one thing
Should pass—that thou couldst rise from earth and tell . . . !”

A voice spoke then. A voice said "*Is it well
To summon weary shadows out of Hell?*"

In armor red as blood he stood revealed,
The golden lilies quartered in his shield.
The outstretched hand—oh, grisly strangest thing!—
Flashed with the sapphire cardinalitial ring.
Three-pointed flame licked up from foot to head.

So Michelotto, with the dawn, lay dead.

GASPARA STAMPA

"Saffo de' nostri tempi alta Gaspara"

VENICE — CINQUECENTO

*"I burned, I wept, I sang; I burn, sing, weep again,
And I shall weep and sing, I shall forever burn
Until or death or time or fortune's turn
Shall still my eye and heart, still fire and pain."*

Like flame, like wine, across the still lagoon
The colours of the sunset stream.
Spectral in heaven as climbs the frail veiled moon,
So climbs my dream.
Out of the heart's eternal torture fire
No eastern phoenix risen—
Only the naked soul, spent with desire,
Bursts its prison.

O love, magnificent and dreadful love,
At last consuming heart and brain,
Palling all days with thoughts we weary of,
Weary of pain—
O golden city set in the sun's heart,
Isled in a golden sea,
Yet what a vague phantasmal counterpart
Of what might be.

Darkness comes down upon your domes and towers,
Dark gondolas gliding under evening bells.
Deep night spreads burning over faded hours
The hell of hells.
The shadows mock me with his step, his sigh.
The treacherous tapers flare

And flaw; but though I stare with burning eye
He is not there.

Collalto, my illustrious lord, it is
So strange! One word, one sign
Would turn, like Cana's metamorphosis,
These tears to wine,
Wine from my heart—or shall my blood be shed
To seal the crumpled scroll,
Who gave you living, who would give you dead
Body and soul?

Capitals, columns, arches, sculptures fall,
The ivy crawls on Istrian stone;
Tower and palace, chapel, drawbridge, all
Time leaves prone;
Only our Alps whose blue without one stain
Blends into higher light—
My namesake stream of the Trevisian plain—
Time finds bright.

Yet will not Time, kind to the Paduan, scroll
My name at last with yours,
Vittoria, Veronica? If the soul
Of song endures
I grasp eternity. O barren bliss
Beside pomegranate flowers
Swayed in the moonlight, and one secret kiss—
Bliss once ours.

For France is far, so far, my dearest lord,
Beyond the Alps so far, men say,
One little word, even one little word
Loses its way.

Is it not piteous then to die, to live
In death, to gasp unheard
In thirst unslaked for what one word could give,
One little word?

And for a faith to tread consuming heat
And for a love to look on death
And to go robed in fire, in fire complete,
With sharp-drawn breath,
While the trapped heart, grown frenzied with its pain,
For joy once scorning fate
Storms with wild wings, again and yet again,
Your iron gate?

The gods returned to earth when Venice broke
Like Venus from the dawn-encircled sea.
Wide laughed the skies with light when Venice woke,
Crowned of antiquity,
And, as with spoil of gems bewildering earth,
Art in her glorious mind
Jeweled all Italy for joy's rebirth
To all mankind.

And we were heirs, true bounden heirs of this
Epoch of glittering life and bannered love
Even as we whispered in our earliest kiss
The joy thereof,
Ere sunlight on a condottiere's lance,
A bitter trumpet blown,
Scattered your words and swept your heart toward France,
Left me alone.

The hyssop on the reed, this, this to drink
In this dark hour shall seal it as the last.

No words, my lord—and no more thoughts to think
When this is past.

Titian awhile his garden walk may tread
And Sansovino keep

My words, words you may read when I am dead,
But I would sleep.

ROGUES' APOCALYPSE

"THE Devil's Den" was the bousing-ken
Of Tom-o'-Bedlam and his Abram men.
Cutpurse, cogger and Egyptian swart
Banged leaden tankards, held high court.
With whey-white faces, patched and scarred,
Rogues of all races, evil-starred,
Wet their whistles, thumped with their sticks,
Brandished the crutch like a crucifix.

Softly sifted the goose-feather snow
From plum-blue night to the Town below,
On crooked streets cobbled, on red roofs peaked,
Where shutters clacked and a sign-board creaked,
Where wavered and fell a golden splotch
From the passing lanterns of the watch,
Rug-gowned halberdiers searching for the
Moon-men painted Moorish-swarthy.

The Gypsies' jackman, bold Jack Kettle,
Bounced from his seat on the firelit settle.
"The gift of a tongue, to all 'tis given,
So up, bully boys, in a song of Heaven!"
And "Heaven!" that mort of wild rogues roared
As leaden tankards crashed on the board,
"A song of Heaven—and set to an air
For the ballad-singers of Stourbridge Fair!"

Bawled Pitch, the pirate, straight from Devon,
"Aye, clapper-dudgeons, a song o' Heaven!"
"Some jack o' the clock-house," shrieked Meg the Harlot,
"Shall write it after in gold and scarlet!"

And a tinker, hung with his pewter dishes,
Crack-brained, cackled of "loaves and fishes,"
When in through the door on their sudden gabble
Floated a music that stilled the rabble:

First
Some harp
Like a sword-blade sharp
Clove through azure ether
With an edge like fire;
Then
A horn
In a harsh gold scorn
Trumpeted rebellion over wind and wire;

*High over towers and gray walls graven
The sun was a lion that ramped through heaven;
Deep under jasper cliffs where it curled
The mist was a snake that swallowed the world.*

Wilder the minstrelsy swelled and gayer,
Bright in the door, like a strolling player,
Stood a man in a cloak like fourfold wings—
Flickering fingers on flickering strings.
Then, as though at a "Silver ram! trim-tram-
Pass-presto!" the walls of the building swam
To mist. They were 'ware all around him there
Of a glittering crowd in the blue night air:

Raphael, Michael and Gabriel,
Uriel and Jeremiel,
Nephelim of the sons of Seth,
(Pharaoh's children caught their breath!)

Rank on rank of the troops that trod
Where Jacob visioned the camps of God,
Mentors of David and Elias,
Guides to Daniel and Zacharias!

Around them thrilled that Voice of wonders
That spake to John as with seven thunders.
From their lips went forth the troublous word
That Daniel in Shushan's palace heard;
Like clean wool flowed their straight attire;
Like burnished brass, like a silver fire
Their beauty blazed that consumed earth's daughters;
"The noise of their wings was the noise of waters."

All crouched and quaked at the shine and burning,
At the roar as of wheels within wheels turning.
Then Night came clap; that wild event
In glittering rose through the firmament,
Upward streamed through a crystal heaven
The inner cordon, the Mystic Seven,
Their wingèd cohorts whirling, whitening . . .
From the wintry sky there went forth lightning.

Jack Kettle gaped. He was long past speaking.
From Tib the Tinker came rabbit-squeaking.
Though Pitch had fought blood-slippery decks, he
Wallowed now in an apoplexy;
But Meg stood forth where all fell prone:
"In the likeness of a sapphire stone . . ."
She whispered, "I see the darkness riven;
He comes with power in the clouds of Heaven!"

And afar
A harp
Like a sword-blade sharp
Clove the azure ether
With a burning strain;
On high
Some horn
In a silver scorn
Rang for resurrection from the pit of pain . . .

The echoes ended. The dawn's faint rose
Slowly crept over ghostly snows.

THE DEATH OF ROBIN HOOD

THERE hangs the long bow, the strong bow, once was bent
To cleave the clout, to split the willow wand;
Till the quiver's shafts were spent
The bow that wrought wild justice in this land.
The red deer, the roe deer knew that bow,
And king and clergy knew
How sure its clothyards flew
To right the poor and lay oppression low.

There grows our great oak, our girthed oak; over all
The shires of England may it branch and be
As once in Sherwood, tall
As truth, and honor's ever-living tree!
The hunted and the hounded knew its ground
For refuge, knew who stood
A stiff yew hedge in the wood
Around its bole, when that the horn was wound.

Merry men all, God spare you to the hunt;
Through time it stretches, down the centuries.
Outlawed, we bore the brunt
Of the hour's disfavor, and its penalties;
Freemen, forever we with free men ride
Whenever, by God in Heaven,
They gather to make odds even!
Our souls with them they shall not fail that tide.

Now lift me; I would see my forest walls
Badged with our colours, yea, till Time be done.
Where this last arrow falls
Sod me with turf the stag treads lightly on.

Go soft then, saying naught; but, hark ye! kneel
When the evil hour would awe—
Kneel and bend bow and draw
And loose your shafts in a whistling sleet of steel!

DARK LEGEND

Two Vardrakes bore the name,
One clean, free from blame,
One filled with hot shame,
Sultry fire—
So the fisher-folk claim
In Blantyre.

White as a peeled willow
Lisa lay, her still pillow
Pale in a room as still—O,
Moonlight-graven,
Dreamed from the rushing billow
Cool haven.

John Vardrake, on the wave,
Watched the cold moon pave
Deepes that betray the brave,
Whelm the sail,
Lapping though in calm they lave
The ship's rail.

Dirk Vardrake, under skin
Darker than his tall twin,
Gnawed lip, wild to win
Lisa's breast.
The ship John sailed in
Stood west.

Dirk to white Lisa's room
Crept through the door's gloom,
Saw the tall bed loom
In pale light;

Swayed in the moon bloom
Stark white.

Lisa—her eyes wide—
Starting up in dream cried,
“Lord, what may betide
This to me?
There—doth my lover glide
Lost at sea?

“Is he of the watery host—
This his death, sent post?
John, John, is 't thy ghost
By my bed?”
“Yea, 'tis I—ocean-lost!”
Dirk said.

“Yet, dead, I sought thy face!
Grant me this last grace,
Let me in thy embrace
Lie still!”
Woe-wild, she gave place
To his will . . .

Horror-wild, woke and strove,
Bound so, in lieu of love—
From the dark clasp above
Writhed to spring;
In the kite's claws the dove
Shuddering . . .

Storm churned a black sea;
Livid waves roared alee;

Death, in full panoply,
Struck home.
Not a spar floated free
On the foam.

John Vardrake, deep-drowned,
Heard a far, a strange sound.
Love with a mortal wound
Cried his name;
Coursing like a death-hound
From death he came.

Dirk, grappling Lisa's war,
Saw through the open door
Apparition cross the floor
Blue as breath;
Felt, to his soul's core,
Chill death.

Moon lit the still bay,
Crept where the dead lay
Floor-fallen—made stay
On Lisa last,
As—through its false day—
Her soul passed.

Thus, when the rockets trail
From the far, the doomed sail,
Iron winter riming rail
With icy fire—
Fisher-folk tell the tale
In Blantyre.

TURPIN AT VAUXHALL

TURN-KEYS, tipple your purl again,
Toast your shins at a midnight fire;
Hiccough of famed high-Toby men,
Robbers of bagman, lord, and squire!
Newgate ghosts, with a ghostly wreath
Crown the rogues that your tales recall,
Gay flash gallants of Hounslow Heath
Cantering forth from Hatton Wall!

In a brilliant barge from Whitehall stair,
Sue and Thisbe, pretty Miss Prue,
Up azure Thames through evening air
Close to the Vauxhall landing drew.
Turpin, late from the great North Road,
On the Grand Cross Walk surveyed the crowd
Where temples, pavilions, statues glowed
Under glittering lights in a rosy cloud.

Bow Street runners, patrols forgot,
Where peer and poet in tie-wigs paced
'Twixt mimic cascade and goblin grot,
(Gay coats full-skirted, flowered and laced,)
Where coloured like crocus gleamed each gown—
Bright eyes a-sparkle from fan or hood—
Where red lips chattered the talk of Town,
In the midst of it all Dick Turpin stood.

Thronged by gallants they passed him by,
Thisbe and Prue, on their conquering way.
The surf of voices swelled loud and high.
The booths were crowded, the music gay.

Old legends awoke in Turpin's mind,
(His nostrils tingled with *eau de luce*,)
Of Colonel Blood and of Captain Hind,
Of Claude Duval—and the hangman's noose!

He turned, a-shiver. In ambushade
His black mare waited. 'Twas near the hour . . .
Down graveled paths to a darkling glade,
He checked—at a sound from a shadowed bower,
A muffled shriek! With whipped-out sword
Bold Turpin burst through a screen of vine
As Prue, in the grip of a maudlin lord,
Flinched back from a table splashed with wine.

By a twist of the neckcloth spun about
Highwayman collared blustering peer.
"You have lost me a Bishop's coach, past doubt—
Have periled my neck, you must pay me dear!
So, my Vauxhall fowl, be you neatly trussed;
And, I beg to relieve you of—this—and this;
One move—and I lessen with cut and thrust
The proper price for a lady's kiss!"

'Twas thus, in the summer-house, gagged and bound,
With oyster eyeballs that glared to curse,
Marveling maskers at midnight found,
Purple and mottled, Milord Fitzurse . . .
But, slowly reined from a meteor ride,
Where low in the sky dimmed London Town,
Turpin's mare struck a dreamlike stride
Under the starlight, over the down.

Musing, her rider stroked her mane,
Twirled a white rose he stooped to smell,
Pursed his lips as to tune again;
“Strange,” he murmured, “what then befell—!
And I must live—” (and his smile was young)
“I must live a rogue—who have lost a bride;
And indeed, my dear, I shall live to be hung!”

He was hanged at York, come Eastertide.

EUGENIE'S SOLITAIRE

IN A yellow room
Till past midnight,
A scarf of black lace
Across white hair
And around her face
That, on blue gloom
Or in pale light,
Swims ivory-clear,
She of the fluttering parchment hands
Plays solitaire.

The clock tocks.
Each long black pane
Streams with the rain.
Against the fire
The fire-irons' brass
Glitters like glass,
Or gold, or vain
Desire.
The cards are laid,
The cards are laid
As breaths respire.

White and exact
On green baize
The lady lays
Her cards.
Her hand hovers
To see
What the card covers.
She
Thinks swift small thoughts

Of temper—of tact—
Quickens her hand
Or retards,
Shifting the ill-planned pattern of the cards.

On each card's back
Is a gold crown
And golden curlicues,
A web design.
The cards shine
Brittle as glass, as she
Lays them down
Like a person paying dues;
King—knave—
(You see?)
A heart—a spade for a grave—
A club for a crown—
A diamond to brave
The rabble, like renown—
But not to save!
As the eyes smart,
A spade, a heart,
She lays them down.
Red—black,
A Queen—a Jack,
A Heart—a Spade—
Black—red,
A Club—a Diamond instead!
They are laid.
The light flickers;
The room widens;
The walls fade:

Flaring and blazing chandeliers,
Conversational surf seething beneath the lights.
Ices, spilt wine;
Floors that shine
Like glass; a uniform
With a crinoline, that nears;
Bright eyes, bright lips—
Bright mockeries, bright nights,
And the golden bees aswarm—

And the fears, and the fears!

Her hand hovers
To see
What the card covers.
She
Purses her lips to imaginary roses
In Spain again;
Then the thought closes
Like a black box-lid in her mind.
Her eyes swim blind,
As her hand
Quickens its fluttering movement, or retards
That gesture of a sunny, gallant land.

Red—black (And the rain!)
Blood—death, France and Spain!
Erectly now, imperial again
In her midnight dress,
Exact and passionless,
She plays the cards.

ANGEL INFANCY

(Victorian Era)

I

WITHIN the close the lawn is green and trim,
The wall of brick bright red with vines in view,
The clouds are lambswool upon eggshell blue;
The Dean, black-gaitered, has a mouth that's prim
While round the bald gray-tufted head of him
Pink cherubs on their harps twang hallyloo,
Floating plump-limbed on air as cherubs do,
Or did when ladies never wore a limb.

Discreet in billowing crinolines and lace
And balmorals and little buttoned boots,
The ladies sip and simper. Overhead
Framed in a window, with jam upon his face,
A pudgy boy ingeniously makes snoots
At all below, wishing the Dean was dead.

II

The lavender decorum of the sky,
Paling toward evening, tints the scones and tea,
And all is sweetness and sobriety,
Save where an inspiration from on high
Has now impaled a large blue-bottle fly
And lowered it on bent pin carefully
To where the dozing Dean—for it is he!—
Lets tir'd eyelid droop o'er tir'd eye

O wild hosanna from that outraged nose,
O crinoline-flurry like a flower-bed bowed

Beneath the rainy gust from riven cloud,
O face suffused, each feature in what throes—
Where the tea-table with silver clash careens,
O glorious gaitered leap that is the Dean's!

III

The moon, that white-faced coachman of the brougham
Of night, drives high in heaven the dappled cloud,
While sofa'd parlors settle deep in shroud
Of shadow. Under eaves, an urchin's room
Fills with wild puckish fancies that beplume
Young anguish and disperse a phantom crowd
Of Deans with leathern straps; though night is loud
Now with cathedral chimes that roam and boom.

Thus, Blinkered Era, of lugubrious joys,
In rose-filled closes dozing life away
Or, stiff in broadcloth and in bombazine,
Marching to church the God of little boys,
Your gloom I rifle of one heartening ray
Lighting a day of Tommy's with the Dean.

SCHOOLROOM OF POETS

AN AUTUMN dusk darkened my window panes.
I saw a jeweled lamp with silver chains
Glow on my wall, the lamp of poetry,
Wreathing me round with mists of memory,
Breathing rich names. And then—a voice it was—
*“Where left you Chrononhotonthologos
Aldeborontiphoscophornio?”*
The battering syllables came tense and low,
Stirring to laughter with their quaint bombast.

And then I saw that I had somehow passed
Into an ancient schoolroom, raftered low
And dusk and dim, save for a firelight glow
Making the walls with grotesque shadows dance.
There, near the fire, some huddled boys by chance
Were tracing pothooks, whispering, mending pens;
And the strange words I heard had come from thence.
The bluecoat boy who spoke them turned his head.
“Digne Mastre Canynge,” was the next he said,
“Your arcublastries and your asenglaves
Be wychencref to brayde emmertleyng staves!
The fetive baubles of the song I reap
Toss like emblazoned banners in a keep.
Besprent with comets is my brigandine;
Damoiselle Poesie my daised queen.
Brystowans, kneel! In fiery meteors dight,
With ye, dull Saracens, I join the fight,
Like to King Richard, lyoncelle of war!
Above St. Mary’s hangs a blazing star.
This parchment—this—!”

And in the firelit gloom,
As in the Church's ancient charter-room,
The child, large-headed, knelt beside a chest,
Oblivious to the converse of the rest,
Scanning the documents whence he would draw
That work that Walpole set without the law—
That fifteenth century hoax, that echoes still
Even to the crest of steep Parnassus hill

Quaint elfish knight of Bristol and of London,—
Swordsman of satire Holborn soon saw undone
When want as an armed man stood by your side—
Midget of genius and imperious pride,
You and your Rowley shine at last enskied!

And then another voice withdrew my gaze
From the child fashioner of archaic lays,—
Another poet? His vivacious eyes
Glittered with dreams. A Latin exercise
Fluttered from off his knee. And then he bent
His tossed brown curls upon his book intent.
Tooke's "Pantheon" or Marmontel's "Peru,"
Which held him breathless there I never knew;
Whether the old Athenians passed him there
Wearing the golden tettix in their hair,
In the broad agora mingling their himations
For arguments, rejoicings, protestations,
Or if, indeed, the alacritous hyaline
Parted to show the god Apollo shine
Bending his ivory bow—or if, again,
Keats climbed the Andes with Pizarro's men,
Their steel cuirasses glittering through the snows
Where Cuzco's fate would soon be Mexico's

And Atahualpa's dungeon shine in state
With golden goblets and with golden plate
Piled for his ransom—and his mortal loss
To cruel cavaliers, who bore the Cross.

The room seemed vibrant with great song that calls
The ages slave, as once on Carian walls
Apollo laid his lyre, and all the stones
Resounded in harmonic undertones.
Round that brown head that housed no thoughts of fame
Flickered the bright, authentic, Tullian flame!

I roused at last.

A homely, pock-marked face
With kindly eyes, met mine, as from his place
Young, wise, erratic Goldsmith smiled—the boy
Whom the old quartermaster near Lissoy
First taught of ghosts, banshees and leprechauns,
(To rival young John's satyrs, nymphs, and fauns),
And stirred with tales of the Allies in Spain,
Of Port Mahon, and Barcelona ta'en,
Of Stanhope at Brihuega lost to hope,
Of freakish Mordaunt, friend of Swift and Pope,—
Battles and heroes, camp and counterscarp,
And, through it all, the sad sweet Irish harp
Keening Cuchullain.

Of the Fortunate Isles
You knew, who knew "the daggers in men's smiles";
Fluting the fops to rustic heydeguy.
Sweet missel-thrush that sang to lowering skies!
You lifted golden landfalls on despair's
Dark sea,—O Lydian touchstone of sweet airs!

Nor you forgot your Ax-yard beggary
When Newberry's counting-house paid forth your fee,—
In purple smallclothes, scarlet roquelaure,
And fine lace neckcloth, standing by the door
To dispense bounty,—and thence merrily
To the "Turk's Head," or to the Thrales for tea,
Where Burke and Reynolds with—not at—you laughed,
And Boswell raged at many a quiet shaft.
"Inopem copia fecit!" ghosts must say
Who mocked your small-talk in their Georgian day.

Here you sat dreaming, whimsical with mirth,
Toasting your toes before the fires of earth!

Then I perceived that in that schoolroom warm
"Brown Silks" sat by "Mad Shelley" on one form,
Their arms entwined, while Shelley, fair and slight,
With gleaming hair and round blue eyes alight,
Told of the dragon in Saint Leonard's wood,
Or of the alchemist none understood
Who lived in Field Place attic.

And the child
Of splendid churchly vision bobbed and smiled,
Shy with his words, but near as elf to elf,
Quoting some bit of Shakespeare to himself
Or Latin tag, with luminous eyes of awe,
As in the dormitories of Ushaw.

So faded that old schoolroom, as its fire
Died, and the shadows gulfed the seats entire;
And, as I woke, sharp on my window-pane
Came the quick rattle of the falling rain.

Better than in their verse, than in their prime,
I love my poets in their seedling time.
What words could match that close and vivid charm,
Young dreamers by the fireside, arm in arm!

SIR HORACE AND THE STARS

REMOTE in an age of other latitudes,
Strawberry Hill wore a Gothic crown—
And Emma Hamilton, Nymph of the Attitudes,
Thrilled London-town.

And Orford's earl was the famous Sir Horace
Who wrote of Otranto Castle's' gloom
Till spectres gamboled a dead-men's morris
Through the drawing-room!

Yet, Horace Walpole, your Gothic gables
Shadowed of genius the fitful fires,
In those great days of gaming tables
And hoops and wires,

For you avouched—of Herschel's planet,
Two billion miles from the sun's faint hail—
While lifting your spying-glass to scan it,
“Were worlds like quail,

Observe how Herschel with sport in love is,
And, searching the skies from his snug retreat,
Flushes up millions of fluttering covies
Of stars, at a beat!”

Yet best you remarked of what may come
To our own air-voyaging century soon,
“I long to bait within distance of home
And rest at the moon!”

Strangest of prophets, your words have carried
From periwigged days to our modern air,

Who cursed with the gout and died unmarried
In Berkeley Square,

Indulged in preposterous narration,
Wasted yourself in verbal wars,
But on wings of blazing imagination
Flew through the stars!

THE BIRD FANCIER

OVERHEAD a bleak and sinful sky

Muttered with thunder; and thick and rolling
In from the bay the fog came billowing,
Blurring out outlines, yellowing
Pave and front, to deep vague bells tolling;
And still that shop drew the Stranger's eye!

Each sagging house, a crouched suspect, eyes him;
But the window he peers at, like a spectrum
Flashed full on one, or a sudden plectrum
Plucked across strong chords—how its panes enveigle!
Its smeared, bleared panes! Each dares—defies him;
For, within? 'Tis alive, to enchant and surprise him
With cockatoo, oriole, owl and eagle!

And more marvelous birds, all in gorgeous feather,
Snap eyes, stretch necks, ruffle wings and preen them,
Giddy before him, on swings, in cages.
Days of the Sultans! Days of the Mages!
Who before in such array has seen them,
Or where before? How they ruffle and lurch
And swing and cock on each swaying perch
And peck and yawn golden beaks and stare
Like viziers, like rajahs imprisoned there
Of their haughty lineage well aware!

He chills to the fog. He stamps and shuffles.
The sound strikes through, and each proud bird ruffles—
Startled, inquiring, perchance conspiring—
Each inky bead of an eye upon him,
Ready to flock to, attack or shun him.
He stamps again. At their backs a curtain

Of crimson moves. Does a gray face show
In just a glance of disturbance so?
A wizened face? Well—he is not certain!

Beyond all cause perturbed he stepped away.
Straight a last glimmer from the smothered day
Badged in raw gold that nameplate on the door.
Nearer he craned, forward he stepped, and more;
And knocked, even while his pulses said him nay.

A thing to remark at least, as that door swung slowly,
Silently inward. On such a view it gave!
Out of the street as out of a moldering grave—
Into a chamber enchanted, bedizened wholly
With birds, birds, birds! From the ceiling they sang and
swung.

Cages on cages, a clutter of cages hung
So crowded upon the walls they seemed wrought of wings,
Shimmering colour, gilt wires, and crests and breasts
Of sleek iridescence—close-woofed of all fluttering things.

And his host before him; a vivid body
(Striped wasitcoat, blue tail-coat, black skull-cap!)
Surely spirited forth from some antique cuddy
Of Time's lumbered store-room; a quaint, brisk chap,
His tight black breeches bursting their stitches:
“Eh? Pray you be seated! I heard your rap.
Just in time for a ra-are bird, sir, you are:
A grass-green Surinam jacamar!”

Carmine, maroon, turquoise, orange, yellow:
Such variegation as rustled around him
Ached on his eyes, came to quite confound him!
He reeled to a chair. Curse that bent old fellow

With eyes so brilliant and strange he thought them
Topaz! A Mogul might have brought them
In his high-swung howdah from some Orient court;
Gouged them into the yellow old skull for sport!
And this cheeping, chattering, chirping, flustering
Of birds—here, there, all about him clustering . . . !

Over a cage of brassy wires
The Fancier bent in a mothering way.
The Stranger stared in a golden daze . . .
Trilling and caroling wrought a haze
Of faint, far strumming, of phantom strings
In the dream-thralled courts of ancient kings—
Fabulous realms of an elder day—

*Sung at sunset
In lost Cockagne,
Rung through Yvetot
Like bells in the rain,
Through the trees of Yvetot
Leafless, bare,—
Melody lingering,
Ringing in the air! . . .*

“Well, here’s a flamingo” (he heard the Fancier)
“Direct from a Patagonian river!”
A scarlet neck coiled around in answer;
Two humorous bird eyes made him shiver.
They winked at him with no fear whatever
And the wide bill split in an eerie—smile?
A cold hand closed on the Stranger’s liver.
He shook to a sense of impending guile!

Why, the shop was—queer; but—bosh! He was drowsy!
With a cough he straightened and stared at the ceiling.
A canary—chuckled? A bullfinch frowsy,
Like a coy girl over her muff, (revealing
What?) looked away. The room *had* changed feeling!
Something lurked and entrenched itself—here—yon—there;
In each cage, on each perch, sensed double-dealing;
A poise of mystery in the air!

And here once more the Fancier hobbled
With a green-glossed, goggling, glaring treasure.
It shook its crest, it strutted, gobbled,
Eyed the Stranger—aye, seemed to take his measure!
And—he felt a sudden and frightful seizure,
For out of the tail of his eye he saw
At the back of the shop emerge with leisure,
Sudden-from-nowhere—a bird of Awe!

From the jacamar shuttled his gaze, rose owl-like.
To this further wonder, as nearer came
The cassowary, approaching fowl-like.
But fowl-like he thought it only in name!
He felt his pulses shorten and thicken,
He felt his loud heart-beats press and quicken,
As it stalked him, like some colossal chicken—
A tufted chicken—yet not the same!

Then a screech-owl screeched from some cock-loft hidden,
A macaw flapped down at his ear to tweak,
And a gold-breasted trumpeter squawked unbidden
His battle-call through a gaping beak!
An ostrich loomed forth in his scaly gaiters,
Three jackdaws grinned from the wall like satyrs.

The Stranger's gaze flamed with suns and craters—
A spoonbill's spatula chilled his cheek!

Then his eyesight cleared, and his host (as josses
Might smile on their slaves) rubbed his hands with glee:
"For I wished to remark that albatrosses
Go fast this season. We've left but three—"
"Not so fast! Not so fast!" cried the paling Stranger
As he leapt to his feet all alive to danger.
But the Fancier leered like a money-changer
And gripped him. "You'll buy one, and you'll pay *me!*"

His topaz eyes glared. Did he fluff bedizened?
His long nose sharpened. He cocked his head.
Like awls those eyes bored their prey imprisoned,
To sunbursts they grew as the moments sped,
Till doubt no longer the fact dissembled:
On the Fancier's arms the feathers assembled!
The Stranger trembled and looked and trembled . . .
His fight to the door took a year of dread.

.

The sky hung grayer. Bleak rain was falling.
Fog eddied on through that shale-gray mews.
Weak stumbled the Stranger from thought appalling.
The cobbles stuttered beneath his shoes.
Down backstreets squalid and dark and narrow
His eyes swam colour, he shook to the marrow!
He shied and ran from a hopping sparrow
Through a feathery storm of unholy hues!

GIRAFFES

It is hard to find them, a shimmer among the mimosas,
In the hot lands, through the tall trees;
As they crane and stand
They blend with the land;
One doubts one sees
Such queer contours browse high among the mimosas,
Branching like trees.

Once there was one that stalked through bell-towered Florence
While the rich-robed crowd exclaimed aloud;
Once in the glaring Roman amphitheatre
Beasts like these
Stood tall as trees;
Still are they half a myth in their gaunt, ungainly
Pose of pride
Patterned and pied;
Their turning gaze is an old interrogation
That irks our ease.

There is queer mirth in the horns,
In the eye swerving,
Black as sloe,—
In the deer's ears,
In the long tongue's flicker,
In the steep neck's curving;
There are queer fears
At this arch initial of some erased design
Walking your world and mine.

Here is a hieroglyph, an untoward beauty
Mixed with a laughter of line,
A sudden shock

Of gorgeous fancy parading wastes of sand,—
A barren land
With this grotesque familiar seeming to mock
Our solemn scene,
Our careful green,
Our pastoral, our sunset by the clock.

They sport, they breed, they ramble and they amble
In mottled groves
With their mottled loves;
Start at the rifle, scramble
With flying hooves
Frantic from danger; sudden they stumble, dying,
Lopped by the stroke of death,
To the yellow sand beneath;
Adrift, their strange white skeletons are lying
Stripped by the simoon's teeth.

In the mind it is hard to find them, as in the vision;
Here and there
In the fetid air
Of dreary wired enclosures they mark misprision
With an alien stare,
Balancing boredom against monotony,
Diurnally,
Eternally,
Accepting the life we bear.

But we who sometimes glance their way and wonder
For a little while
And gape or smile,
Do not truly believe; if we saw them plowing,
Slanting and high, against the sky,

If we saw them stalking the streets, but not in the circus,
Hauling loads
On our travelled roads,
We should laugh at first, and then their tawdried glory
Would only guide our goads.

It is hard to understand, too hard to measure
This wastefulness by our worthiness.
This whim of design, the inexplicable pleasure
Wrought by what we affirm the "meaningless."
Spectacular? But then our aim is other,—
Oh, quite! These fancies troublingly retard . . .
Why should Creation bother . . . ?
But the hieroglyph's too hard!

DEER IN MOORELAND

"THERE are about fifteen deer roaming," you write, "in Mooreland."

Yes, I remember Mooreland, and I remember the deer
That made it an English park, though deep in the Cumberland
Valley.

I recall one year

When, as a little boy, I built my dream of Mooreland
From seeing the freckled deer there, the fawn deer, all
agrazed,
Watched through the palings and trees; real deer, in velvet,
with antlers
And delicate, innocent ways.

The Cumberland Valley road runs right through Cumberland
Valley,
Through the middle street of Carlisle, where the train came
rumbling down
With the bell of its engine clanging, as it was always clanging,
Into my grandmother's town.

Then a hundred yards seemed a mile. I had not thought of
Mooreland

So near to the tracks and the train, till I saw it later still
When the town was changed and grown, though the honey-
suckle remembered

That trailed my grandmother's sill.

And the deer, I think, remembered. There still were deer in
Mooreland

Grazing, resting in shade, just as when I was a child;
Aloof and stately stepping, lifting delicate antlers
And soft dark eyes and wild.

The smoke of our sacrifice blows east, blows west; the roaring
Mills of the newer gods put forth titanic power,
Trenching the earth with havoc, heaving the world to cities,
Moulding the final hour;

But still there are hills to a valley, a river with spangled shallows,

Yellow twined honeysuckle, a broad-leaved buckeye tree,
And glittering stars at night; and still there are deer in Mooreland

As there used to be.

MAN POSSESSED

SHAKEN, a thousand times shaken, with the millions that grieve,
Now at last I am overtaken. I will say I believe.

I ran with the pennons of morning astream over me.

On the precipice, scorning its warning, I ran to be free.

Still I love high winds and the great running and the steep verge,
But strength past my strength overtakes my cunning, and stars
 emerge

High over me, eternal, deathless, deep over deep,

And my head sways heavy as I run breathless, my eyelids
 droop with sleep.

Yet it is not this has shaken my soul in me,

Not the bounds of life have overtaken my will to be free,

But scent and sound past mete and bound, and a sign—a sign
That no other eyes can recognize, that is only mine.

I hardly know what I believe or what I mean

Save there is sweetness round my heart and the world a screen
Of interwoven mystery to a world unseen.

Can one drink the air, can one seize the sea, can one grasp
 the fire?

Even so intangible to me the answer to my desire.

The elements we feel and see shift and drift and suspire

And we therein behind the screen, with glimmering brains
 that tire.

That is all! Nor can I fall now in the race.

As a second breath to a runner comes my soul takes up the
 pace—

For I dreamed the world ran with me in a far and starry place.

Gray as sea-mist driven were the shapes that strove
With the strength of greed and hate and the greater strength
of love.

I saw their eyes like phosphorus, blue fog about them wove.
I saw the limbs glimmer and I heard the sighing come
From this side and from that, as our host ran dumb
Over a silver shining plain, to some strange end, to some—
Was it goal or heaven or city?—some agonizing gleam
That broke the heart for pity and made the eyes stream.
Above the pallor of that race our spent breath rose like steam,
Yet our red hearts pulsed within us, as we ran, in my dream.

A glow below the ghostly surf that swirled and surged and
turned

Came from human hearts visible that throbbed and beat and
burned,

And like sand of human ashes was the soil our feet spurned.
All the stars above us thronged the dome of space,
Poised like javeliniers, with glinting spear or mace,
Watchful of our running and to spoil our race,
And all the souls that ran, ran with drawn and lifted face.

This too was the real. I ran with dogged heart.
I parched like a desert, tortured in every part.
I knew not what city—nor why the race should start.

Then a singing touched me, and the scent of a flower,
A child's laugh, and the crying of a woman in her hour,
And a comrade's courage—and a subtle power

Not of worldly schemes and ways crept along my veins,
And my heart went ablaze and consumed its many stains,
And my lips were touched with wine and my body felt no pains.

Then it passed—and yet again it came and it passed—
Yet again and yet again, till I toiled at last
In the old ironic torture, bound fast, bound fast.

But as I looked I saw how it came and went,
That touch, that communion, almost inevident,
Through the host of these my brothers who ran nigh spent.
When it came they ran like men with life and lung
And the wind went by them like a song bravely sung,
Their hearts spread wide radiance, their limbs glowed young.
It passed, and they were phantoms with phantom arms that
 swung.

Here and there a true form some spirit would endue
For moments, but we mortals were but ghosts, I knew.
Then a light low down before us to a distant landscape grew.
The stars from heaven crowded down. I knew our race was
 through.

The stars from heaven crowded down intolerably bright
With dizzying brilliance, height above armored height.
Every star upcast a spear and hurled it down to smite.

There was one strange thought in me. It echoed through my
 head

As some titanic corridor echoes a giant tread,
Only a little thing that my love once had said.
Common daily speech, a comforting word
Tossed to me as lightly as crumbs to a bird,
But it lived in my heart, it broke to flame and stirred
My self to a purpose at last not self could mar,
And I cried, "We are delivered!" and I heard it echo far
Up to the vault of heaven past star on shrinking star.

So then I was running through poppies that I knew
Above a blue sea basking—and you—and you
Were running on the headland in the world made anew.

I know some force is mighty, some force I cannot reach.
I know that words are said to me that are not said with speech.
My heart has learned a lesson that I can never teach.
Only this I know, that I am overtaken
By a swifter runner Whose breath is never shaken,
That I follow on His pace, and that round me, as I waken,
Are the headlands of home and the blue sea swinging
And the flowers of the valleys their fresh scents flinging
And the prophets and the poets, with their singing—with their
singing!

NIGHT

LET the night keep
What the night takes,
Sighs buried deep,
Ancient heartaches,
Groans of the lover,
Tears of the lost;
Let day discover not
All the night cost!

Let the night keep
Love's burning bliss,
Drowned in deep sleep
Whisper and kiss,
Thoughts like white flowers
In hedges of May;
Let such deep hours not
Fade with the day!

Monarch is night
Of all eldest things,
Pain and affright,
Rapturous wings;
Night the crown, night the sword
Lifted to smite.
Kneel to your overlord,
Children of night!

THE DESERT BELLS

MORE strange, more clear than in campaniles swinging
Or afar in the foam,
Through the desert years he could hear them eerily ringing,
The bells of home;

Gone again in gusts, yet ever again as he hearkened
By the poisoned wells
Where the arid endless æons loomed and darkened,
Came the desert bells.

With the jaguar night aprowl, with the voices muttering
And the eyes past the fire
Lone-lit in the waste, O that clear bright music uttering
More than desire.

O to wake, to find the world but a nightmare vision,
But a dream in the night,
With the wide pale dawn no longer stale derision
But the old delight.

Is it gone, thy strength—have the tall walls fallen to the
leaguer,
Is the standard rent,
Strides the shadow by the runner's side who was swift and
eager
What way he went?

Beyond palm, beyond place, beyond any dream of disaster,
Any goal deferred,
While the body has breath, while a spark in the mind is master,
There is music heard;

So rang the bells through the darkness, clearly, faintly,
 Past mirages gone;
Through the utter night of the soul, now strong, now gently
 The bells rang on.

Over league-long lion sand, in the sun a torment,
 In the night a dread,
Where death towers in stars or all day like a burning garment
 The heat is spread,

As water to thirst, as the very water of heaven
 From a waste defiled—
As the hand of a child in trust to one's hand is given,
 As the eyes of a child—

Like the jubilant laughter of youth when merely being
 Seemed endless day,
Like the moon on a torrent, like moon-mad waters fleeing,
 Falling in spray,

Like the birds of dawn, like all birds of the evening crying,
 Flying the cloud,
Like the yearning of love toward love, through the dark
 replying
 With passion proud,

Like valour's shout to the charge on foes unnumbered,
 With high-flung head,
Like the voice to Lazarus, "Rise!" whenas he slumbered
 But rose from the dead—

So rang the bells through the darkness, clearly, faintly,
 Past mirages gone;
Through the utter night of the soul, now strong, now gently
 The bells rang on,

Gold within gold, while the world's loud rumour dwindled;
By the desert wells
Where all human tears with the endless sands are mingled,
Rang the bells. . .

MIGHTY IS MAN

To THE body of woman man turns and seeks deliverance
From his world grown strange since deliverance from her
thighs;

To the womb he returns, to his infancy's paradise,
Blind with a dream, an outcast weary of severance.

From the body of woman man rises with exultation
Shaking his veins. Singing, he whets a sword.
He is freed of his weakness now, he has loosed the cord
That binds him to alien mysteries of creation.

Again he is mighty, he stamps for joy of his strength;
His words, his deeds will be clamorous round the earth.
Woman, who bore him, merely gives him rebirth
Who returns to spurn, and return again, at length,

To the grieved eternal breast that lulled him since life began,
To eyes that smile in the dark on that baffled Antæus, Man.

THE NEBULÆ

IF ANY care, in time they'll tell
How this befell or that befell,
And inmost chaos miss again
As men forever must with men;
Recall the gait, the curious face,
Even remember time and place,
How gay I seemed or how in funk,
How crabbed, staid—alas, how drunk—
But, like my brothers bright or dull,
My world is worn within my skull;
Fair ladies who have never moved
Through life, I have annoyed—and loved;
Vast countries that have never been
On maps, I have explored and seen;
Yestreve you met me? Did you see
How Artaxerxes walked with me?
“This was his life”? How tritely blind!
His life was always in his mind;
His senses summoned as with drums
To insensate milleniums;
Word overheard or thought half-guessed
Woke trumpets east, waved banners west,
Created myth most highly prized
And lavishly particularized!
The mind will fail, some time, some when;
The little candle lit in men
Will wink, as though it drooped the lid,
On what I said and what I did;
But where my dragon fancy fed
You'll know not, nor the fountain head
From which to trace those fiery streams

That branched from sudden blinding dreams.
Nor may you filch the secret mirth
All of earth, nor quite of earth—
The thing that was too good to keep
But laughed at only in my sleep;
For still I wander, still I waste,
Still I touch and still I taste—
And still remains this overplus
In all men, and beguiling us . . .
Look up then, lovely women and men,
Brutish, baffled, born again
By moments—O look up and see
The shimmer of the nebulæ
On the high night, down the blue well
Where, sprawled in mist, chimæras dwell—
More than mere stars of sparkling facet;
Intimations—oh how tacit!

HYMN TO STUPIDITY

God of our gods, Stupidity,
Foil to the good, the fine, the free,
Great potency whose bloated hand
Lies ponderously on sea and land,
Clay bulk of blindness, deaf and dumb,
Whose kingdom since Earth's prime has come—
By scorching stake and bloodied foam
And holocaust and hecatomb,
By smoke of lies and stroke of sword,
Thou knowest our allegiance, Lord—
Aye, and all men's subservient knee,
God of our gods, Stupidity!

Breeder of crime, great toad of lust,
Heaper of flame with dung and dust;
Procrustes of all knightlihead,
Racking all souls to one strait bed;
Voice of the forum loud and harsh
Full of frog-rhetoric of the marsh;
Awful percipience whose small eye
Views art through ordure of the sty;
Apocalyptic commonplace
Whose every utterance is base—
Yearlong the nations cry to thee,
God of our gods, Stupidity!

Yet art thou the retracted bow
Wherefrom the harrying arrows flow
Flaming in scorn on crumbling gods,
The incubus that sets at odds
All valiantry against the dull!
Thy greed and sloth make beautiful

Wild escalade and starry raid,
Even doom upon the barricade.
Under thy shadow, enormous dolt,
Brighten the spear-heads of revolt,
Till thousands rise by land and sea
Against thy throne, Stupidity!

DEAD LETTER OFFICE

FROM the mind of mankind, like rapid invisible fires,
Where do the agonized prayer and the wild wish go,
Crying on heaven—of the unbearable throe
Born—and those desperate, unappeased desires
That also assume no outward verbal attires?
Constant, incessant, up through thin air they flow,
Sparing the lip to learn or the ear to know,
Emissaries secret, sealed with the blood of our sires.

Protests, adjurings, hopes like missives of cloud,
Where do they fade, or where do they whirl as leaves?
Lost in their urgency, all too long unclaimed,
I have seen them hide in the silence of the proud,
In the dark ironic eye, in the smile that grieves,
In the wound unshown, and the name that is never named.

EYE AND MIND

EYE, finding jewels in the seas,
Script upon leaves, and rhythms in trees,
Is to its counterpart most blind,
Which is the Eye within the Mind

That turns the graceful arabesque
Next moment to a strange grotesque,
That in dissection as it deals
Seems like an ogress at her meals.

You see but what you think you see.
The heart assigns it its degree.
But, safe above emotions set,
Eye in the Mind will not forget.

The visible takes instant wings
From all its inner world of things
That never are as they appear
But suddenly assume the queer.

Discern a grass-blade in the sun,
But more than its appearance shun,
For inner sight is crack of doom
To certainties that you assume!

However keen, however bright
May be the organ of your sight,
Eye in the Mind will never miss
A more adept analysis.

Knowing the motions of your blood
And your complexities of mood,

If beauty you surmise you view,
Eye in the Mind will tell on you!

Though splendour clothe a mouldering hall,
Though Spartan Helen walk the wall,
Eye in the Mind will see, inhuman,
A ruin and a faulty woman.

So pray for that clear, wondering sight
Relieved the cave-man's world of night,
And shun with infantile elation
The realm of ratiocination!

THREE-VOLUME NOVEL

TALKING of books and life, you said lightly—
In the way of talk, with the worn phrase, the fumbling
Makeshift word, and the dagger-dart of a sprightly
Insight, with words forever building and crumbling—

You said of a situation whose implications
Wandered as wide as cowpaths over a meadow
That a certain human life in its mixed relations
Loomed like a monolith, cast a gigantic shadow.

And I thought of lives I had known that adumbrated
More than will ever be known, till writing and printing
Seemed flimsy lath in the face of life created,
Or mere cold clay adorned with a little tinting.

Image-makers, dupes of the hieroglyphic,
Slaves of words perpetually wreathing
Quick, actual life—the one and only specific
For human despair, the thing that is living and breathing—

What pyramids of tomes we have raised to puzzle
Its meaning forth, and to voice our praise or censure,
When the warmth of a woman's breast, or a dog's muzzle,
Can swerve our histories into real adventure

Deep and wide and strange as all intuition,
With circumstance in infinite, intricate linking!
So we address us to ink, and the mild perdition
Of aping life with something we call our thinking.

NEBULAR HYPOTHESIS

BEHOLD in heaven how glories gather
Beyond such heaven as hoops our thought,
When rapt imagination's pinion
Out-towers eagles, finds dominion
In void unstirred of any feather,
In the unutterable naught!

There not in air and not in æther
The unwearying and luminous wing
Is buoyed beyond the suns' far seething
On an eternal even breathing
Of one vast spirit—and the Breather
An unimaginable thing.

Thither, ingathered by the Dreamer,
All dreams in colour or line or form
Returning through that diamond weather
Architectonic flash together
To scheme past any terrene schemer,
Brilliant as music, blind as storm.

Uprushing raptures of creation
Valved with all pulsing joy and pain
Wrought to a world of marvelous motion
Like a great berg afloat on ocean
In dazzled light, by subtle suasion
Of an incalculable brain.

O there beloved, all loved, forever
As light you are, in light you move;
Pride of the father, tears of the mother,
Silver sister and golden brother—

The glowing mind of all endeavor,
The full irradiancy of love!

No atom of all beauty, gathered
From earth the mote that shows the main,
From striding mountain to trivial flower,
Escapes the animating power
Whereby the furthest stars were fathered,
The sand regathered grain by grain.

All the incredible forms of matter:
Flowers so delicate, frail and small;
Miraculous leaves and awesome grasses,
Almsgiving grain wherethrough there passes
The rippling breeze more strange than water
Lake-tranced or wild in waterfall;

All lovely color in the sun-dance
Pervading skies; the vivid hues
Or fainter tints of all creation
From flower to beast; a revelation
Of inexhaustible abundance,
Delighted tidings and bright news;

The beauty of the body of woman,
The wave's curve and the vase's slope;
Sculpture of thew in athletes girded;
The grace, the fury of wild things herded
In strength and speed to shame the human,
Maned lion, arrowy antelope;

The vast fantastical in nature
From tiniest antennæd things
To shag gorilla's booming thunder,

To rainbow fishes' stare of wonder,
Or pied giraffe surprised to stature
Or scale-legged ostrich scant of wings;

All wizarded emerging issue
Of wilder primal dreaming wrought;
The atom with whole Babylons teeming,
The floating cell of Solomon dreaming,
Unriddled plasm assuming tissue,
Blind tissue weirdly taking thought;

All these are in their time retaken,
All these the imagination sees
More strangely found than lost; and, seeing,
Hovers a-wing to scan the being
Of Man, whose powers but just awaken
Nursed through the glimmering centuries;

All these the glories building glory
In Man's so curious mind and young,
Natheless whose life is one long daring
Toward light, forever light forswearing,
Till only madmen seize the story
With coals of fire upon their tongue,

And, hearing all Man's many voices
From continent to continent,
Crying on love, in anger crying
From birth, through life, and choked in dying—
Lost in a maze of infinite choices,
Ash on his head and raiment rent—

Upleaning by that tower of babel
Storied of every age gone by,

And harking him in every nation
Raising his pæan of exultation
Or bitter wailing—these are able
At last of Man to prophesy

No loss of aught that forms that tidal
Antiphony of joy and pain,
No loss of aught he sees as beauty
Or fiery-lighted fearful duty,
No dissolution, but a bridal
Wherein forever all remain

Dissolved, resolved, re-formed, uplifted
To scheme where is no small or great,
But wonder past his measure of wonder
In apparition and still thunder,
In dream wherethrough the æons have drifted
Like mere ephemerids of fate.

Though only with his eyes and vision
Man sees, in his own terms alone,
Such power in him and through all matter
Moves that, as Christ walked on the water,
A spirit thives his thought's derision,
Whose lightening can dissolve the stone,

Whose energy shall gather wailing
At last into eternal light
Where every atom finds its station
As in a dream's transfiguration,
Like music on the dark prevailing,
Like throngs of towers, height on height,

That burn as cloud, fulfilled of voices—
Like love that meets with tears that stream
Lost love—like all miraculous changes
Through which, even now, our planet ranges—
For thus his intricate art rejoices
The marvelous Dreamer of the Dream!

LONELY DOLPHIN

SKY and water like the inner glaze of a shell
Blending their nacres
Rippled in faint colour, and on the undulant swell
Of the infinite acres
Of the ocean, ploughed by a gleam of the sun to gold,
A darkness curved in spray
Far from the haunt of its mates, and hurdled and rolled
In the gathering gray.

The rounded slippery back ink-black and sleek,
The flash of the underside
Glimmering white, the strange and flattened beak
Stabbing the immersing tide,
And like a lone far sail the dorsal fin
Slanting and furrowing far
Till the flippered tail again bade frolic begin
Under the Northern star;

Like an elemental and fantastic wish
In a world first made—
Acrobatic evolution of the dreams of fish—
Where no music played
The dolphin danced—as that elder sunset day
Saw quaint saraband begin
Round the dark Sicilian ship, and porpoise-play
Of ancestral kin.

But here no golden musician, death-surrounded
By mariner enemies,
Clutched his harp till over the ocean sounded
Such melodies

Lonely Dolphin

As still in darkness, obsequious to the moon,
It chants for underbreath;
For here no dolphins hung on Arion's tune
Ere he leaped to death

Yet cheated death when a dark fin bubbled across,
A slippery back upbore
His fainting body, and so at Tænaros
He waded ashore—
But now it seemed as ocean twilight increased
And the legend left the mind,
Here gamboled the last of all dolphins and the least
Far from its coast and kind,

Snorting in foam, and then in a limber arc
Gathering its back to lunge,
Scattering pale pearl and patterning the dark
With curving leap and plunge;
Creature of instinct, in mysterious mirth
Frolicking lonely and free
With a gesture utterly alien to our earth
From the cold and ominous sea!

BECAUSE YOU CAME TO CLIMB

TURN on this shelf of cliff, and see
Far off the brightly patterned plain
Webbed with those roads that memory
Alone may now regain,
In all their dust and heat
Surprised by flowers—
Mark the tall towns, where many a street
Rang with bright hours!

Because you came to climb the sky,
You noted not the rock grow steep,
Though ominous wings at times went by
Adrift as if on sleep.
Now iridescent light
Veils all the plain
So many storms made strange with night,
Sombre with rain.

And rock is chill on either hand,
And sky is just as far above,
And there below you lies the land
You were so heedless of,
So burning went your haste
Through field and town
To seek the height you finally faced,
Whence you look down.

At least for this new sight was given
The height—though never to reach the sky,
But only now to see your heaven
Reversed, before you die;
And yet, you came to climb,

And you endure—

So turn your face to the rock of Time,
Make one more foothold sure!

MIDDLE AGE

WHAT may be said for this aging sinner
Who likes his glass and enjoys his dinner,
Who shows to the world such sorry features
And is still so fond of the pretty creatures,
Who has wasted years in such strange employ
Yet for all his fears ever tasted joy?
Put by the scrawls that he took for writing,
Let the parchment serve if the fire needs lighting;
For all that'll lead him through fate's dark maze 'll
Be eyes he loved, blue eyes and hazel,
Dark braided hair from the fond young years
And that hair bronze-lit like the sun on spears;
The happy saint, and by her side
The silver princess, the kitten-eyed;
With these and two men, a dark and a ruddy,
He'll face the end, though the end be bloody.
His talents indeed let the napkin cover
Who can laugh with a friend and is still a lover,
For as to rewards for accomplished duty
'Twas ever but love that brought him booty,
The proof of which being (peace to his pillow!)
One blonde girl laughing, as lithe as a willow,
One brown-haired beauty, her mother's twin,
And a tall boy built like a javelin.

DAUGHTERS

I KNOW I never did devise
Two tall girls with kind clear eyes.
This is more than life allows:
Two tall girls with candid brows.
I wonder how one understands
Two tall girls with slim, deft hands,
Quiet, graceful, moved to mirth
By—to them—a smiling earth.

Children that they were I've known.
Now, they hardly seem my own.
Now a sudden stride is taken
And the bough of life is shaken
Musical for them; for me
'Tis a gnarled, deep-rooted tree
Flourishing through sun and rain
From the darkest soil of pain.

Can it be they move and breathe
With anything I could bequeath?
Most their mother, yet not she,
Strangely have they come to be
Two tall girls who unaware
Waken spring in winter air
And with their beauty say "Let be!"
To all straitened agony.

I know I never did devise
In love and passion on this wise.
She, all grace, conceived this grace.
Yet in time and out of space
An individual pulse and thought

Have clearly and distinctly wrought
Some stilly miracle made new
In the difference of these two.

CHALLENGE TO ORION

BRIGHT influences of the Pleiades,
Two thousand years before one omened birth
Dusk Egypt caught the Spring's approach from these
Glittering at sunset up the curve of Earth.

Mysterious seven, of ancient reckonings hid
As Cheop's secret, when his reign was full,
In the slant passage of Gizeh's pyramid—
Strange jewels in the shoulder of the Bull—

These, cried the plagued of God—these can'st thou bind?
Spring portents even now in heaven you seem,
Genii of all young passion has divined
Though black disaster hound the ecstatic dream,

Though still pursuing beyond Aldebaran
The hunter haste with destiny in his hands,
The hieroglyphic of the sworded man;
And who, 'tis written, may loose Orion's bands?

Stars like to seven silver doves in flight,
Spangling such haze as veils the Galaxy—
Suns that advance the cohorts of the light,
Daughters of Atlas and of Pleione,

Heralds of May and Maytime's foam of flowers,
Madness at heart beneath a dubious sign,
Against you march inexorable powers
Yet still in heaven you nothing do but shine,

And so have ruled the destinies that hover,
Beyond their sight, beyond their sighing breath,

Through ancient mysteries of lover and lover
On all the myriad roads from life to death

That still they dare the dragon and the lion
Laired in their path—whatever perils loom,
All star-enchanted challenge vast Orion
To follow furious with his stormy doom.

WICKED SONG

TELL the heart it is late; but the heart will not care,
It is fitting moony beams for a palace of air,
Unlocking midnight doors to a light soft knock.
When was the heart content looking at the clock?

Tell the heart it is late; but the heart will not heed.
Beauty smiles as it goes, and a quick-whittled reed
Makes a clear silver call to a pair of dark eyes.
When did the fond heart pretend to be wise?

Tell the heart it is late! It will simply put on airs,
Swim torrents in spate, climb eleven flights of stairs,
Step across to the stars and slither down the rain
To tap and tap again at a bright window-pane.

Tell the heart it is late, as time at last will tell
By the ash in the grate, by the slow passing bell;
But the years will flow back through a long million miles
And the mourners will wonder why the old face smiles.

Tell the heart it is late; send a crier through the town;
But a lovely throat lifts from a peach-coloured gown. . .
Here's a rosebush in flower can furnish a token. . .
When was the heart happy biding unbroken?

Tell the heart it is late—it will jingle its keys,
Whistling quite silly for its mixed memories,
Fix its scarf at the mirror, scan the viands that wait,
And fidget by the window. . . It knows it is late!

GUARDIAN NAIAD

You are clear water, you are lyric water
Running clear.

The truth is in your eyes, it is in your smiling,
In the heart—here!

You are rippling water, you are sliding water,
Glimmer and gleam;

A dark pool spirit, a cool naiad's daughter
Seen through a stream.

Face strange with changes, sudden subtle changes
As the shadow glides
Of cloud on a river or flees along the falling
Water-slides;

Loving the sunlight, flashing to the sunlight
All the love you have found;
Weeping through the darkness, through deep winding darkness
All alone, underground.

When you lift your throat, as you do, you are a river
Rising from its cave
Dazzled into day—when you turn arm or shoulder
They are curved as a wave.

In your various voice all the melody of water
Is sorry or gay;
Falling grave and still from your quick delighted laughter
Is the water's way.

Shining into shadow, from shadow into shining
You go bound, yet are free;

Healing in your heart, but hiding certain secrets
Deep for no one to see;

Musing like the water, murmuring as water
And vague and afar

At your soul's crystal source, in the dark wizard mountains
Where the memories are;

Then sudden to sunlight, impetuous as water,
You return with surprise,
The light of clear brooks, the laughter of all rivers
In the blue of your eyes.

SUNG TO PERSEPHONE

THIS should have happened in youth,
My youth—not this
Youth of your own which is all
Apple-bloom fluttering to fall,
Exquisite fragrances
Freezing my heart with the truth.

I can remember the boy
Whose heart had been seized
Of old with pain of delight
Banishing sleep from the night,
To curse, were his lady displeased,
Or shout to the stars of his joy.

But that golden city is sacked,
We know—who have known
Mays too white to recall,
Romance with sceptre and pall,
And clenched teeth gritting on stone,
And the Gorgon eyes of the fact.

Why should your beauty be touched
By things we can bear
And suffer, because we are wise—
Or the dancing light in your eyes
Share our despair,
Or your heart by the furies be clutched?

We, who were sick for our graves,
When suddenly Spring
Seemed all around us in bloom—

Light from the riven tomb
 Streamed—the incredible thing
Happened that sometimes saves.

Youth possessed us again,
 Going gallantly by
With laughter; we seemed to move
In the light of wild innocent love
 Rapt, for an instant—the sky
Brighter for all our pain. . .

But you, so quick with the truth
 We have twisted and wried—
Laughing now in the sun,
Unwise and adorable one—
 Oh shun our pain and our pride! . . .
This should have happened in youth.

ANSWERING LETTER

NOTHING so dearly sought
Comes without fear to the thought,
Fear to the sense,
Discounting evidence.
Nothing that is as this
Comes without fear in the kiss,
Fear in the all unplanned
Fervor of hand in hand;

Or—can you understand?

I, who have seen
Time's dark guillotine
Sudden on high
Sundering golden sky;
I, who have known
The immovable stone
Set at the crypt sealed—
Night on the stricken field;
I, who deep in me
Know my own treachery,
Yet, almost as soon,
Cry for the moon;
I, whose body and blood
Put on false hardihood—
Who, at a moment's remove,
Am pierced with love;
I, who have gazed on and sing
Of a beautiful thing—
O, be it set apart
From my shameful heart!—

Deepest in me, my dear,
Know fear, know fear—
Blinded, seeing too bright
A creature of light.

LIGHTED CITY

THROUGH the dusk, as the lighted towers
To north and west—
Each beacon marked for ours—
Lift crest on crest
Till our tall dark windows gleam
With glittering, fabulous light,
One moment stand and dream
With me, tonight!

Through the cold, through the harrying heat,
With ancient fears,
Those streets have known our feet,
Those walls our tears,
Though now for a magical space
We stand aloof above
A maze we may not retrace,
Alone with our love.

Yet, through our wounds made part
Of the shuddering beat
Of the city's dungeoned heart
From street to street,
Its desert days and nights
Lift us at last to share
This dream of glittering lights—
A city in air.

For us they flare, those fires
Against dark powers
Blazing from golden pyres
On striding towers!
O love, the lighted skies

Cry, "Night is overthrown!"
Now, as you raise your eyes
To find my own.

THE TWO DEEPS

UP THE Milky Way the Swan
Glitters. Planetary flight
Inconceivable to Man
Moves majestic on the night;

Yet the shuddering city sleeps
And you lie in breathing light
Absent in more cryptic deeps
Than the infinity of night.

Through what stranger vast the mind,
In its sleep so like to death,
Wanders—how may mortal find,
Marveling on your quiet breath?

Or does another void abase
All your tremulous desire,
While our universe through space
Rushes toward Vega in the Lyre?

FOURTH DIMENSION

MOVE through the lamplight near me, settle down
And with your silence that affords my rhyme
Consolidate our edifice in Time
While wind and darkness wander over the town.
Our days are waves in one deep flood that drown,
Our hours in ruins—yet this hour is prime
And seems to some vast language paradigm
Of the inflection of home, that sorry noun;

For yonder where your bright head and slim hand
Frame an unconscious gesture like farewell
To a daft world, I feel our walls expand
To usher in a starry miracle—
Nor are we in this place, but everywhere
Inhabit the illusion of the air.

Between us and between the world and us
The vibratory currents in flesh and mind,
Communicated to four walls, unbind
Their atoms, of infinity rumorously;
Since actuality—at the overplus
Of all our energies would seek and find—
Seems unto unreality consigned,
And the aggregate to invade the nucleus.

Mere dream of our potentiality,
Our radioactive essence, though this be,
Can hives of girdered steel indeed contain
The pantherine lightnings of Man's hope and fear,
The thunderbolts of Judgement that we hear
Crash through the Eden jungles of the brain?

I saw at dawn the high-massed towers of stone
(One with its beacon gold on rose-veined sky
Still burning) from a window dizzily high
Where we, like others, live immured alone
With the eaglets of our dreams forever flown
From eyried hope. . . . But how the heart can ply
Crowbars not iron to wrench all stone awry
Till material habitation be overthrown!

See here our books, our pictures on the wall,
Our huddled furnishings—yet at the call
Of lion emotion or of exquisite lust
Or houndlike purpose, as though these walls were glass,
Through them in sudden shafted light we pass—
Tenants of strange heavens, in a house of dust.

SONNETS TO MY FATHER

I.

You rhymed like Lear for us when we were small.
Our walks with you were full of things mysterious
Made magic by your twinkle and half-drawl,
Because we could not tell if you were serious.
You rose to some occasions quite imperious,
“Explained” the jokes to us in comic papers,
And read us Russian fairy-tales, the shapers
Of visions grim, fantastic, and delirious.

You laughed at us and teased us and regarded
Our medieval lives with understanding;
And often there were monsters that you warded
Away with words unique and mirth commanding.
We’d hang across the landing till we’d fall,
Waiting to hear your step down in the hall.

II.

“Well, bears!” or “How is Little John to-night?”
“The man who made this match, my son, must be a—”
“Oh, Father, you’ll not *please* turn on the light
Until we hear what happened to Gackelea!”
“Dark? Nonsense! Read? A very strange idea!”
The leather chair at last denounced this attitude,
And, coiled at various lengths, we breathed beatitude
Before some world’s-end castle on Mount Moria.

There, at endearing sprawl that never cost you
True dignity the loss of one iota,
We would regard you from precarious posture,

Squirming with exclamation points, or stilly
As a hushed mouse, while thrillingly you'd quote a
Rhyme, or wake fairies in a tiger-lily.

III.

Time, the dark whale, spouts blithely from his spiracle
A jet of memory that makes glad the sun.
In you the intuition for true fun
Wrought us the breathless and quotidian miracle.
You taught us words like these with pomp satirical,
And I have but to listen and I hear
Your voice croon, "Shed no tear, oh, shed no tear!"
Swayed between the ironic and the lyrical.

Hard lines in Cæsar, equations in quadratics,
Charades, acrostics, walks that made us pant
And sit on stones because our breath was scant
And our legs short; the furbishings from attics,
Furniture, daily bread, child-grief that stings,
You took, transformed, and made amazing things.

IV.

Yet you have looked, even as all men must,
On the Medusa, and looked down her eyes.
Now I perceive it, in my time made wise
Though not with half the valor or the trust;
Your spirit blue as steel unflecked by rust,
Your mind forever snapping dragon-flies
Whimsical at their sheen, their sting of lies
But relish, where so soon all things are dust.

You held life to us like a twirling prism
Nor flinched a facet with your curious gaze.
You said, "Yes, so it sparkles, so it sways."
You hated, loved, and smiled. No syllogism
Had said the last. All ways you cast your looks
And walked the world and read a thousand books.

V.

You had the touch, the gesture, the exact
Quick divination for a thing well-said.
Sometimes I only find in what you read
To us your overtones, that drove the fact
Of greatness home with thrust, that thrud close-packed
And marvelous Browning with a tongue in cheek,
Thrilled to him on his heights, enjoyed his Greek,
And so took all the gods, with spacious tact.

Your detestation inchoate Carlyle
Turned Prussian-blue; your weakness, Stevenson.
("They" call it weakness!) In the lucky-bag
Of literature you angled, for a while
Parceled the patchwork, when the day was done
Knew every banner from every bogus rag.

VI.

You found a quartz-stone, Duty, and you found
A white lamp, Truth, and Honor, a sweet fire,
Whose ways are up the jagged crags that tire
But whose domain has azure for a ground
Where trumpets snarl no more but golden sound
Hangs rapt, like the great ending of a song.

There you have peers. There all your years belong,
Who took that road, slung with a magic lyre.

Your hands would never touch it, but in shade
Of your proud thoughts, your dreams, to children's ears
What men will never know, but the heart hears
And sees bright-meteored mount the frowning years,
All of itself, all of itself it played
That high fantastic tune your spirit made!

SONNETS TO LORA

TIMES SQUARE MOMENT

I WEAVE between two dark pedestrian streams,
My spirit frenzied by the clashing light
And tumult and strange terror of a night
Glaring with skysigns and devoid of dreams—
Dazzled of eyesight by flamboyant themes,
Confused by voices that no thoughts disturb—
The droning of the beggar at the curb
Nearer to truth than all this fanfare seems;

Yet are there iron stairs that lead to heaven,
The oddest heaven of any jesting god,
Mirrored fantastic space of scant repose,
Where certain eyes on mine have suddenly shriven
The world of sin, and brought a period
Of discord to a bright, miraculous close.

EDEN

Beauty is broken like bread, like wine for me
Is poured, who never have deserved the same,
Who twice before within this garden came
And saw the splendors of the living tree
Rooted in earth but to eternity
Reaching its boughs, thick-fruited all with gold;
A marvel few if any may behold,
Or, so beholding, tremble at destiny.

Therefore my heart is water in my breast,
Therefore my utterance falters and is mute;
Silvered with moonlight hangs the heavenly fruit.
What vandal hand would lift, what hand would wrest
From the dim bough the passionately divine?
And here I stand—and lo, the hand is mine!

SEA LOVERS

Between the white dune and the living sea
In sudden vision I saw your beauty bare,
The sea-wind snared within your sunlit hair,
Your grace the grace of all things young and free;
And where a sunset spread its blazonry
Of how you moved my senses were aware,
Like golden music through a golden air,
Till darkness fell, and you were hid from me—

No, never! for the heavens were alight
Suddenly, after that, with myriad beams;
And so you turned and took me to your dreams,
And so we clasped each other on the height,
And night, that would have thrust our lives apart,
Knew for its pulse one single throbbing heart.

THE FEAR

I yet shall fail you—who am I to say
I shall not fail you, when it is a fear
The greater by the depth I hold you dear?
Remember, oh remember in that day
All that the man intended who was yours,
Yours utterly, and broken by your love—
The rare resolve forever set above
Some miserable action that endures.

I shall not promise, for too well I know
How in Time's wind our words are blown like sand.
Only submit your hand unto my hand,
O proudly humble let us together go
Forth to our fate beneath ambiguous skies,
Perhaps with power that shall confound the wise!

AS YOU SLEPT

Belovéd heart, dear and belovéd heart,
I looked on you in sleep, and all the years
Were gathered together in a mist of tears.
The inassuageable tears of all time start
From one deep fount of recognition clear,
Of true love, of the brave and beautiful thing
Whereat the heart faints while the pulses sing
As deepest bliss imagines peril near.

Dear love, dear child, if there is ever rest
For us, if ever under any sun
The time is given to ponder in unison
How we are wed, how we are greatly blest,
I may have words that miracle to attest
Who now in deep emotion can find none.

URSINE SONNET

(For Lora, who would have me write of Bears)

THE bears who ate the little boys who cried
Against the baldhead, I'll have none of these;
Nor bears that gorge on honey in hollow trees,
Nor even snowier bears who breach and ride
The ice-floes of the bitter arctic tide;
But I'll have bears to suit your drolleries,
Blunt, rough, and furry. May my fancy seize
Such roly-poly bears to be your pride.

They'll sit observing you with solemn eyes,
Small in a row; or if you should be sad,
Turn comic somersaults to make you glad;
And, since they are my thoughts in strange disguise,
They'll give you looks too loving for a bear
And thump their paws in praise of golden hair.

MICHELANGELO IN THE FISH-MARKET

HERE's colour for my monsters! Verily,
This is no Arno-spawn,—far greater game!
These shimmering, gleaming, flashing forms first came
To sunlight in the great Ægean Sea.
Ye sacred symbols! They have whispered me
Your Greek style bears the initials of His name
And titles, where lies hidden in the same
The Sibyl of Erythra's prophecy!

Howbeit, Messer Domenico, you
Shall gape to see my drawing when I'm through.
What dawn-pulsed gills, what splendor on each scale!
This mullet's bottle-green, with silver under,—
That weird, dark-flecked murena,—well, no wonder
I shall net Popes when soon I spread my sail!

THE SILVER BALLOON

THE soubrette's song still echoing in his ears,
The footlight dazzle still upon his eyes,
He craned to look, and saw the blinded skies
Yield what the searchlights sought. Great shafts like shears
Raked west and east. "How calm that beggar steers!"
He thought, appraising with but small surprise
The floating doom. Two aeroplanes like flies
Crawled up the stars . . . it seemed for years and years.

The searchlight dimmed. The four-point-sevens spoke.
The long bulk lurched a little, loosed a speck—
And from the crowd fierce pandemonium broke
He saw no bomb, no flare, no toppling wreck,
But—in his mind—Kensington Garden noons,
And an old woman selling toy balloons.

PEARL DIVER

I HAD an image of the bright, bare Day
Like a tall diver poised above the surge
Of blackest night, where its vast fluctuant verge
Lapped against heaven's ramparts, broad and gray.
Flickering with ghostly fires, beneath him lay
That gulf where light must drown that light emerge.
His nimbused radiance stooped to dare its gurge,
Plunged, and flashed deep through showers of starry spray.

Swift his tranfigured contours clove the dark,
Suffusing fathom on fathom of night aswirl
With tints of rose, all tremoring into one,
Till from cloud floors he plucked a filmy pearl
And held it high for earth and heaven to mark,—
The cold globe of the winter-shrunken sun.

JUDGMENT

Down the deep steps of stone, through iron doors,
I entered that red room and saw the rack,
And round the walls I saw them sit in black,
The immutable and urgent councilors.
My heart was clotted with an old remorse,
Despair a vulture fast upon my back.
I saw my body like an empty sack
Tossed disarticulate on grated floors.

But even a wilder wonder at this crime,
Tried in the dungeon of my own grim life,
Woke, as your memory awoke with tune
That crazed the very walls. I stared through Time
Like to a man who stands with smoking knife
Above his dead, and sees the rising moon.

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